Campione! Volume 13

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 13".

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）

高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール

《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

清秋院恵那（せいしゅういんえな）

当代随一とされる「太刀の媛巫女」。
護堂の「剣」として侍る。

沙耶宮馨（さやのみやかおる）

正史編纂委員会東京分室室長。

甘粕冬馬（あまかすとうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

アレクサンドル・ガスコイン

黒王子の異名を有する魔王。

アリス・ルイーズ・オブ・ナヴァール

グリニッジ賢人議会前議長。白き姫。

ルクレチア・ゾラ

サルデーニャの魔女。護堂の「現地妻」。

装丁／川谷デザイン

た 9-13

カンピオーネ！ XIII 南洋の姫神

丈月城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

英国の魔王（カンピオーネ）・アレクの元に白き姫・アリスとサルデーニャの魔女・ルクレチアが訪れ、ある問いをぶつけていた頃、日本の魔王・草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）は媛巫女（ひめみこ）が集まる大祓（おおはらえ）に、祐理（ゆり）や恵那（えな）と参加し、注目を一身に浴びていた。そこにもたらされた甘粕（あまかす）の依頼によって、事態は意外な展開に!?　南の島で祐理と二人きりになってしまった護堂だったが!?

丈月 城（たけづき じょう）

原稿に追われてEURO2012は決勝戦しか観戦できず、
しかもイタリアの惨敗という結果に終わったのですが、
アレッサンドロ・デル・ピエロの来日&
チャリティーマッチ参戦で
十分に埋め合わせはできております。

シコルスキー

今更ながら自宅のネット回線を光にしました。
実に快適です。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 **丈月　城の本**

カンピオーネ！　神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！　Ⅱ　魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！　Ⅲ　はじまりの物語
カンピオーネ！　Ⅳ　英雄と王
カンピオーネ！　Ⅴ　剣の巫女
カンピオーネ！　Ⅵ　神山飛鳳
カンピオーネ！　Ⅶ　斉天大聖
カンピオーネ！　Ⅷ　受難の魔王たち
カンピオーネ！　Ⅸ　女神再び
カンピオーネ！　Ⅹ　槍の戦神
カンピオーネ！　Ⅺ　ふたつめの物語
カンピオーネ！　Ⅻ　かりそめの聖夜
カンピオーネ！　ⅩⅢ　南洋の姫神

丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

南洋の姫神

Campione XIII

リアナ

恵那

祐理

？？？

護堂

エリカ

夕陽で紅に染まる太平洋を一望できる、
オーシャンビューの絶景。
風と空気は冷たいが、
温泉の熱気で体が冷えることはない。

「ふう……」

熱いお湯につかりながら、
エリカが吐息を洩らす。

熱帯のまぶしい太陽。今日はみごとな快晴だ。
白い砂浜。汚す者などいない
魔境のビーチはまさに純白。
とびきりの美しさだ。
そして海。常夏の南洋でのみ向き合える、
底抜けに澄んだエメラルドブルーの海。
ここに集い、のびやかな肢体を露わにする
水着の女の子たち……。

「いや。この状況下で
海水浴するのも、
いかがなものかと思うんだ」
護堂は冷静に指摘した。

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丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カピオネ

南洋の姫神

Campione XIII

ありがとう
ございました
しこる

Prologue

It was during early December.

An unexpected visitor had come knocking on Alexandre Gascoigne's door.

He was currently located in one of Spain's leading metropolises, the Catalan capital city of Barcelona. This was a harbor city famous both in the West and East for the arts, tourism and soccer, among other things.

Alec was sitting in the deeper interior of a bar located not far from the harbor, having his dinner alone.

Baaar. To Japanese ears, that was what the Italian pronunciation of the word "bar" sounded like.

At any rate, it was a restaurant that combined the elements of a cafe, bar and an eatery.

Alec leisurely enjoyed his meal comprising of small fish and prawn fritters, along with a tomato and olive salad, while sipping his white wine.

Seeing the two females both of whom he had known for a long time approach him, he raised his eyebrows.

"This is quite the rare combination... I should say. Not counting that princess over there, even you have gone out of your way to come here and meet me."

"Fufu, there are times when even I leave my island."

The one who was smiling and answering was Lucretia Zola.

The witch who lived on the island of Sardinia, in Italy. Although she should be an elderly woman, her appearance had strangely maintained its youthful look. To Alec, she was an ' advisory partner that he would find difficult to meet even once in two or three years'.

And there was one more person who was yet to be mentioned.

"I'm not that discourteous a person to do something like chasing after you all over the place, you know? You're the same as always, judging people with only biased prejudice."

The person who had calmly said that was Princess Alice.

She was a beautiful lady from England, with whom he had an inseparable relationship as bitter enemies for the past decade. With the pure beauty of her wavy platinum hair, she gave off the atmosphere of a holy woman disconnected from this world, which made her stand out even more than Lucretia.

However, her nature was not quite as pure as her appearance.

Laughing scornfully, Alec disregarded her words. This princess was a Duke's daughter who often paid extra notice in investigating Alec's movements. Her aim was to be earlier than anyone else in knowing what disturbances the Campione of England would be bringing to the world.

"You're not doing so because of goodwill to the public, but rather to satisfy your own officious nature. Which is rather deplorable, to be honest...."

"Alexandre, that's not something you should say to a lady."

"If you call yourself a lady, then you ought to act like one. Didn't you send your subordinates to investigate my location this time?"

Alexandre Gascoigne was an elusive Campione.

However, he had no intention of erasing all traces and news of his movements, and was never particularly wary of the subordinates he had around him. After all, he could throw them off anytime he wanted.

"So, what do you want? Seeing that you ladies have expressly grouped up and come together, it's obviously going to be nothing good."

Looking intently at Alice's and Lucretia's faces, Alec brought the glass of white wine to his lips, taking a sip.

"What are you talking about? I heard that our Prince had a conflict with that Japanese that we're all acquainted with and thought I'd come and have a talk about that. Since we haven't had one in a while."

Without asking for his consent, Lucretia took a seat directly opposite him, while Alice sat down right beside him.

"But first, let us give a toast; a moment of silence for Princess Guinevere, she who was tied to all three of us by a fateful bond."

The waiter then brought them glasses of Sangria.

Lucretia lightly raised her glass, and took a sip. Alice's glass did not have anything in it. The princess' body was materialized by ' spirit body separation', a spirit power. Hence, she could not consume any food or drink.

"What we want to discuss is the [King of the End], whom that princess had gambled her eternal life seeking. My Prince, what is the actual truth behind that?"

"Behind what?"

"I've been concerned about it ever since Kusanagi-sama and Sir Lancelot had their deathmatch... Alexandre, do you have any clue of what the [King of the End]'s true name is?"

"And before anyone else finds it —— we want to obtain the remains of the Divine Blade of Salvation."

The old witch was looking as though she was enjoying herself with the solutions to a riddle while the princess had a rare serious look on her face.

Fixated under both their gazes, Alec shrugged his shoulders.

"If only it were that simple. This is a mystery even the Divine Ancestors could not figure out after a thousand years. Could we even discover anything with just a few years of investigation?"

"And that, is what our Prince says. What do you think, Princess ?"

"Those are merely the laudable words of a sourpuss who hates losing. Surely, there are a few hypotheses inside his head, but due to lack of evidence, he did not mention them. Anyway, once he has enough confidence, he would then explain with an arrogant look on his face, Obaa-sama."

"....."

The pair of witches of differing ages before him entered into a discussion with each other, in hushed voices.

Alec decided to maintain his silence. Alice was the same as before, loving to speak as though she could see through a person completely —— while raising her eyebrows and expressing her regret.

No, it was the truth that this problematic hero had already thought of several hypotheses, however...

It happened when Alec was drinking white wine from his glass, keeping his silence.

Lucretia had suddenly whispered *that name*. Alec was stunned in an instant.

"Fufu. Pretty close to the mark, was I? My Prince, how much do you think the probability of that hero being the [King of the End] is ?"

"... Thirty-five percent would be my estimate."

Just as one would expect of Lucretia Zola. Perhaps that might have been the results of her fieldwork in Asia and the news of the [King of the End] that had surfaced in recent years. Alec had also heard of something that fit one of his hypotheses.

Alec answered, feeling impressed, as the Princess looked on intently and seemingly suspicious.

"That doesn't sound plausible, does it..... if he had even found out that that could be possible, regardless of whether the figure is beneath fifteen percent or above eighty-five percent, he would continue investigating and think it through thoroughly. That would be Alexandre's way of doing things, would it not?"

Once again, she was talking about Alexander Gascoigne's temperament as though it was her's.

Suppressing the urge to click his tongue, Alec said quietly.

"I'm a very busy person. I do not have the time to waste on researching hobbies."

Placing a few Euro notes on the table, he got up from his seat.

"It is futile to waste any more time discussing this problem. After you uncover new truths on this matter, we will continue this conversation."

Leaving those words behind, Alec immediately departed the bar.

The witches who remained in the bar, left behind by Alec, nodded their heads at each other.

"A woman, hm?"

"Undoubtedly, it must have been due to relationships with women or something like that, that he had run into a wall in his research."

"His relationship with women is simply ill-fated... he's really got no luck with them."

There was no doubt about it, seeing his curt manner of speaking and attitude earlier.

However, the ostentatious person in question would strongly deny it, if asked. Alexandre Gascoigne was in fact the opposite of that prince-like image that he gave off, and was bad at dealing with women.

"In any case, the [King of the End]'s true identity still remains a mystery....."

Princess Alice sighed.

The mysterious war god that seemed to be slumbering in the Bay of Tokyo, in Japan. The exterminator of devil kings, a bringer of danger upon the world. In the near future, perhaps even sooner than they expect, the calamity which would reduce the world to ashes might occur.

They needed to gather as much information as possible, in preparation for the chance of that happening ——

"However, if that's the case..... perhaps the gentleman living in Japan who's good at dealing with women might be able to explain something."

"No, he's way more than just being good at dealing with women ....."

Lucretia knew who Alice was referring to very well and answered without pause.

"To be precise, he is someone who seems like he's ill-fated with women, yet his luck with them is extraordinary. Well, that youth and those girls have been growing even stronger, we should probably place more of our hopes on them...."

This was a scene of the witches, talking about the many problems occurring in the distant East.

Chapter 1 - Rite of the Hime-Miko

Part 1

A simple party had been held on Christmas Eve.

The next day, in other words, on Christmas Day, Kusanagi Godou's companions gathered once again in the Kusanagi residence. Their mission was to clean up the complete mess left behind by the party last night. Due to the party persisting until late into the night, they had decided to leave the cleaning up for the next day—now.

While the clean up was in progress, Mariya Yuri could not help but murmur.

"By the way, Shizuka-san looked quite troubled yesterday."

The Yamato Nadeshiko quietly tilted her head as she brought up what puzzled her.

As the elder brother of the person in question, Godou shrugged and went "I guess so" in response.

"That Yinghua... Always so intimidating but that's his personality, and even though Hikari was cheerfully smiling as always, Shizuka was probably worried because of that."

"By the way, even Your Majesty's childhood friend was frequently making strange faces."

Godou's childhood friend—probably meant Tokunaga Asuka who had joined in the party midway.

"Strange faces?"

"Yeah, looking like she was wondering 'What should I do from now on?' to herself."

"She probably had something on her mind. Maybe I should go ask her tactfully?"

"Kusanagi Godou. I have no wish to speak evil of you, but I would advise you not to pursue that course of action."

Sternly entering the conversation was Liliana Kranjcar.

"You should leave her alone is what I should say. At the very least, if you try to get involved, you will only be pouring fuel onto the fire."

"I-I see."

Godou nodded with uncertainty.

As a side note, the one who took charge of clean up efforts and assigned roles flexibly to everyone was the silver-haired knight who had just offered her counsel.

Yuri also displayed domestic competency rivaling Liliana's.

Although she was not directing others as conspicuously as Liliana, she displayed tenacious effort true to her personality,

making the Kusanagi residence even cleaner and more organized than it was originally.

Even Ena was clearing things up with surprising familiarity and skill.

Perhaps this expressed part of the Yamato Nadeshiko's " thorough education since birth."

Unwilling to let the girls shoulder all the work, Godou also put his serious personality to work, immersing himself in the clean up efforts. Thanks to that, the entire operation was finished in short time.

On the other hand, a certain person's behavior exemplified the life of a princess used to being waited on.

"Well, Asuka-san's matter will eventually resolve itself on its own, through her making a choice—to distance herself from Godou or the opposite. In any case, this isn't something Godou could help her with even if he wanted to."

Erica Blandelli spoke as she wiped the table with a damp cloth.

Though her movements were richly rhythmic, they were far from diligent. Rather, she gave off a sense of elegant leisure.

Lacking efficiency in domestic chores, Erica was clearly unsuited to the task of cleaning.

Furthermore, Godou's younger sister Shizuka had gone out at the invitation of friends, having left the house early in the morning

. Currently, Godou, Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena were the only ones occupying this home. Just Godou's companions.

With the cleaning accomplished, everyone gathered in the living room. As everyone sat around the wooden table, each served with a portion of green tea, Erica slowly began to speak:

"Well then, everyone. It's about time we reach a conclusion for that outstanding issue from a while ago."

"Outstanding issue?"

Godou was bewildered. Was there such a thing?

"Yes, wasn't it mentioned before? I am planning on traveling to Switzerland for the winter break. We can go skiing there, and Uncle Paolo should be coming."

"No no. It has to be Japan. Japanese hot springs are the best choice."

Ena instantly cut in.

"You know, there's an authentic secret hot spring in the mountains owned by my family. We should all go deep into the mountains together and wash out a year's worth of fatigue. It'll be great fun!"

"....."

Faced with Erica and Ena's competing proposals, Godou could not help but close his eyes.

Then he opened them and turned his gaze towards Yuri and Liliana. The prim and proper Hime-Miko smiled helplessly, nodding in acknowledgement. On the other hand, the silver-haired female knight shook her head as if saying "What an inane conversation."

Apart from Erica and Ena, the other two girls apparently agreed with Godou. Hence, they were the majority faction in this 3 vs 1 vs 1 situation.

"About this issue, I think I'd better give my honest opinion while I'm still alive... Well, here's my serious answer, Erica."

"What is it?"

"Ultimately, spending winter break in the European Alps as a high school student... Is way too extravagant. Seriously, there should be limits to doing things beyond a normal student's means. "

"What does it matter? You are the god-slaying Devil King, after all."

"Is that even a reason? Fine, supposing I relent, but we were so busy with the Saturnus incident that we haven't even gotten the plane tickets yet. Taking the bullet train isn't going to get us to Europe, right?"

"No problem. Taking advantage of cancellations is 100% possible, all it takes is a bit of work."

"No way, even if it's possible. I'm sure it's 100% illegal!"

Before Erica could lay out concrete plans, Godou preemptively objected.

Next, he turned to Ena.

"Then Seishuuin, that whatever secret hot springs must be located deep in the Chichibu mountains, right? Can you show me a mountain climbing plan prepared for the journey up the mountain?"

"Uh, what?"

As expected, the Hime-Miko of the Sword was instantly at a loss for words.

"You've never heard of it? In case of emergencies, that write up we give to family and the police before we climb a mountain."

It was essentially a voluntary document. Since Ena called the place a secret hot spring, it must definitely be deep in the mountains. If that was the case, preparing for accidents was only a natural consideration. However...

"It's okay. Ena has never written anything like that."

Seeing Ena completely nonchalant, Godou grumbled.

"Compared to Ena who has lived the life of training in the mountains, the rest of us are simply budding saplings nurtured in city life. All other things equal, we can't possibly climb that kind of mountain in winter..."

Excluding Yuri, the other three girls all possessed above average physical capabilities. Nevertheless, keeping up with Ena whose legs allowed her to jump around like a wild mountain monkey would be a tall order.

Consequently as the arbitrator, Godou rejected the second proposal with good reason.

"Summing up, the time before and after New Year's will be spent peacefully resting."

Liliana nodded in agreement as she spoke.

"Right... Based on my own family's customs, year end aside, New Year's is quite a busy and lively time."

"You also have a New Year's gathering?"

Hearing Godou's mutterings, Yuri asked.

"Yeah. All my relatives, the whole bunch gathers from all over Japan to hold a New Year's party in Tokyo. Not only do they drink like mad, but there's also that troublesome after party. This year, I'm definitely not participating again!"

"Isn't that a simple matter?"

Erica immediately smiled and spoke up.

"If all you want is to wait for the New Year's to pass, simply come over to my home. Live there for a while and let us leisurely enjoy our privacy, just the two of us, thoroughly affirming our love for each other. Hoho, isn't that the most desirable manner to celebrate the beginning of a new year?"

"D-Don't talk nonsense!"

Godou immediately rejected the devil's proposal.

"If it was a guy's place, then sure, but I can't possibly live in a girl's room. Besides, Anna-san is currently on vacation, which means it really will be just me and Erica alone!?"

"Hence there is no problem. Godou, let us have a sweet and loving vacation together?"

"E-Erica-san!"

"Wait a minute. If that is the case, coming to my house is also an option!"

"Even Liliana-san!?"

"It is a perfectly reasonable development for the king to stay at the residence of the one who shoulders the duties of the premier knight and grand chamberlain."

Yuri's dissatisfaction with the red and blue knights' proposals was plain to see.

However, the other Hime-Miko also brought up nonsense at this time.

"What are you talking about? If that's the case, His Majesty can also come to the Seishuuin ancestral home. My house has plenty of rooms, you are greatly welcome to stay."

"Ena-san. Please refrain from such improper proposals!"

"Yuri should come too~ It's been so long since Yuri last visited Grandma, she misses you. This is perfect. In that case, how about everyone stay with us until the end of winter break? I welcome Erica-san and Liliana-san to come together too."

As a result of her naturally open and cheerful personality, the Hime-Miko of the Sword offered a new suggestion.

Erica and Liliana's expressions changed immediately. Their faces seemed to be saying "Rather than taking independent action, let us join forces together instead..." as they planned their next move.

Facing this unstable situation, Yuri objected alone.

"This is so lacking in common sense... For such a large group to suddenly rush there without notice."

"No problem there. Even for an illegitimate child left behind by my deceased grandpa, as soon as grandma found him, he was immediately taken in to live with us the next day."

"N-Now that you mention it, I do recall such an event..."

Godou was rather shocked by this exchange that suddenly revealed the private affairs of another's family.

On the other hand, Yuri fell silent as if vaguely acquiescing.

Glancing at the other's faces from time to time, she seemed to be pondering something. Speaking of which, she was a high-class young lady who easily blushed unexpectedly due to the synergistic effect of her docility and inexperience in worldly ways.

No good. If Godou did not try to stem the current tide of opinion, things were going to develop in a most unfavorable manner!?

Just as Godou was about to speak up frantically, Yuri went "Ah" and spoke quietly.

"Ena-san, it does not work out. We have to attend the Great Purification Rite the day after tomorrow."

"Eh?"

"Furthermore, starting from New Year's Eve, I have to be at Nanao Shrine for three consecutive days. Even Ena-san will be obliged to go forth to some village and work at the shrine there."

Godou realized from Yuri's reminder. Now that he thought about it, the two girls were miko after all.

The period before and after New Year's should be one of the busiest times for them. However, the premier Hime-Miko clutched her head in her arms in shock.

"Eh, even Ena is required to do that?"

"After all, this is our duty and obligation as Hime-Miko..."

"Annoying. In past years I was always training in the mountains and completely forgot about it!"

Ena screamed towards the heavens. Then Liliana asked:

"Mariya Yuri, what is this Great Purification Rite?"

"It is a purification ritual held during the year end when all of us Hime-Miko belonging to the 'East' gather together. But to be honest, given a choice I would prefer not to participate. At least, not for this year..."

Yuri sighed with a gloomy expression.

Just as Godou was surprised by the negativity displayed by the dependable high-class young lady, he suddenly heard a cellphone's lively ringtone. The sound came from Yuri's bag.

"Excuse me." Apologizing, Yuri took out her cellphone and took the call.

The conversation lasted for a couple of minutes. After the call, she put her cellphone away.

Then Yuri slowly spoke to Godou.

"The call was from Kaoru-san. Basically, regarding the Great Purification Rite we were just talking about, whether we should invite Godou-san to come along or not."

"Me? Joining a gathering of the Hime-Miko?"

Yuri explained the situation as Godou listened in surprise.

I see, if that's the case—after hearing the reason, Godou nodded immediately.

Part 2

The morning after Christmas, Godou suddenly informed his sister:

"By the way, I have to go out to do something tomorrow, so I probably won't be back until late."

On the breakfast table there was no one else but the two siblings . Shizuka went "Huh" as she sighed with worry.

"Are you going with Erica-san and the rest of the group?"

"....."

"I knew it. Onii-chan really did achieve explosive growth over the past half a year. Rumors have already spread all around the neighborhood."

"Saying I'm very similar to Grandpa again...?"

"It's gone beyond that level. 'Already like this in his teens, he'll probably surpass his grandfather by the time he's in his twenties!' was what the man at the commercial association said. Very unlike Grandpa in the way you went for foreign girls, that was what everyone discussed with great interest."

"W-What is everyone saying!? This is completely unfounded!"

"In that case, you should show a little restraint in the way you suddenly bring home all these girls from who knows where. And on Christmas Eve, you even invited Mariya-senpai's younger sister—an elementary schooler. Furthermore, you even said you were going on an expedition with that popular-looking handsome guy to pick up girls."

Apparently, Shizuka had judged Sayanomiya Kaoru's gender to be male.

Explaining the truth would probably complicate the situation further. Godou decided not to correct that detail, but instead forced the conversation to bring up another person.

"Didn't I invite another boy as well? Yeah, there was that dude with the slightly fierce gaze, who may turn out quite handsome in the future."

"Ah, you mean that boy whose face was filled with arrogance. Him... Hmm..."

Speaking of Lu Yinghua, Shizuka began to contemplate for some reason.

"What about him?"

"Actually, I did feel slightly concerned. Somehow I get a sense that he's actually far more subservient than that look on his face would suggest. How should I put it, a bit of an underling flavor to him. He looks kind of used to bowing down to a superior..."

Godou was shocked by Shizuka's mumbling commentary.

His little sister here could very well be extraordinary. To think she would discern the dark side(?) of his nephew on their first encounter... Godou secretly prayed for Yinghua, hoping he would not be ordered around like an underling regardless of the circumstances which might bring him to cross paths with Shizuka in the future.

As the siblings' conversation reached the end of their meal...

Shizuka's cellphone on the table began to vibrate. Apparently she received a text.

"Ah, it's from Dad. Heh... Onii-chan, come and take a look."

After checking her messages, the younger sister handed the phone over and Godou read content displayed.

'Dear daughter, I'm really sorry about earlier. By the way, Daddy is planning to stay in the Caribbean to enjoy the sun and yachts for now. Would you like to come over for winter break?'

Shizuka's birthday was in early December. At the time, their father originally promised to return home but did not come in the end.

Apparently he was trying to make up for it. For a middle-aged delinquent father, such intentions were commendable. Furthermore, there was a postscript addressed to Godou.

'P.S. Dear son, I won't object if you decide to come, but be prepared for the misery of being excluded from a heartfelt reunion between father and daughter.'

Indeed this was typical of his father's speech. But more than that, Godou was impressed instead.

After all, the father was a terrible human being who could openly declare 'I'm not the type of person who could treat a useless son and a cute daughter equally!' He was still the same as always, making no progress at all.

"It's the Caribbean. Does Onii-chan want to go?"

Furthermore, before Godou's eyes stood the little sister who openly ignored the father's wishes. Indeed, she was an extraordinary character, not one to be fazed by this level of occurrence.

However, thinking that it would be rather troublesome getting along with this twisted father, Godou immediately said:

"Why don't you go alone? I'm going to be staying over at a friend's place for New Year's."

"Why? If you're living in Japan, there's no reason to stay over, right?"

"If I stay at home during New Year's, I'll be forcefully tied up and dragged to that party by those relatives. I have resolved to cut myself off from gambling matters this year!"

The Kusanagi clan and its branches always gathered somewhere in Tokyo to hold a New Year's party.

The after party always held a crazy gambling carnival. For a good number of years now, Godou had been forced to participate as the defending champion. The only way to stop this ugly tradition would be to get away from home.

But unfortunately, the grandfather was not home this year.

If he left the house during New Year's, Shizuka would be left alone—

(Their mother did say she was coming, but it was uncertain when exactly before or after New Year's she would arrive. Precisely because the mother was a great fan of parties, she would often go around to attend various parties during this time of the year. Consequently, Godou felt a sense of reassurance at the

thought of leaving his mother alone to handle the clan's New Year's party.)

However, given their father's invitation, he no longer had to worry about his younger sister.

As the elder brother resolved himself to go on a trip, Shizuka eyed him with suspicion.

"So the place Onii-chan will be staying at, wouldn't happen to be the home of Erica-san or the others, right...?"

"Don't talk nonsense! I'm completely unlike Grandpa. I will never do anything like that!"

In actual fact, he was inspired yesterday by Erica's suggestion of "living at a friend's."

But he had no intention of living in a girl's home. Godou strongly swore to himself.

After that, the day arrived for the imminent Hime-Miko year end gathering.

Godou left home at eight in the morning to meet up with Liliana. The two of them walked to Erica's apartment and managed with great difficulty to rouse the blonde beauty who always had trouble getting up in the morning.

Then the trio departed from Erica's apartment and took the subway train—

Walking roughly ten minutes on foot from the station, they reached a twenty-story designer's mansion. Their destination was a unit in this building, the gathering place for today.

"Welcome everyone!"

The one greeting everyone at the entryway was one of the inhabitants of this unit, Mariya Hikari.

This place was another residence of the Mariya family's. Their ancestral home was located in the Saitama prefecture, where the two sisters' grandparents originally lived. However, to facilitate the sisters going to school and the parents commuting to work, they had moved to live in Tokyo.

"Is Seishuuin already here?"

"Yes. More accurately, Ena-neesama has been staying over in Onee-chan's room for the past few days."

Hikari replied to Godou's question.

Starting from the day Ena came over from Chichibu, she had already planned to stay for three days or longer.

"Could the Seishuuin and Mariya families be quite close in relationship?"

Liliana suddenly asked.

"Not really. There exists a wide gulf in prestige between my family and the Seishuuins. You could even say that our families are not supposed to associate directly. But since Ena-neesama has that kind of personality, she already became good friends with Onee-chan when they were small."

Entering a childhood friend's home as naturally as if it were her own, Ena became very familiar with the Mariya parents and grandparents, often showing up suddenly without notice to renew her freeloader status.

"Even when Onee-chan is not home, Ena-neesama would play with me, the little sister. She would also make my mother and grandmother spoil her and ask for snacks. As time went on, she naturally became like a part of our family."

"That sort of scene is actually quite easy to imagine..."

Erica nodded, perhaps reminded of Ena's easygoing innocence.

Furthermore, Ena in turn, had invited Yuri to her ancestral home without being concerned with any conventions. Thereafter, the Seishuuin family had not minded the difference in family stature despite being fellow Hime-Miko, and allowed their friendship to continue...

Hikari proceeded to explain the above to Godou and the rest as she led them to the living room.

"Ah, but Grandma Ran, the current head of the Seishuuin family, also seems to like Onee-chan a lot. When Ena-neesama asked her if Onee-chan could be adopted into the Seishuuin family , she answered 'No problem' readily."

"...Why would the Seishuuin family want Mariya as an adopted daughter?"

Godou puzzled over this sudden question as he sat down on the living room sofa.

Erica and Liliana also sat down left and right of him respectively. The Mariya residence's living room had an area greater than ten square meters. This spaciousness, combined with the ample lighting from the sun, made for quite a comfortable environment.

"It's because ever since Onee-chan decided to follow Onii-sama, Ena-neesama worried that Onee-chan would be treated unfairly."

Godou went "Eh?" in surprise. Why would he become the reason for that?

"Seishuuin, Sayanomiya, Kuhoudzuka and Renjou—amongst these Four Families and their branches, although it's only a minority, there does exist those who arrogantly look down on families of lower stature. Especially those obstinate members of the older generation..."

Hikari spoke with a slightly troubled expression.

"Because Onee-chan is an official Hime-Miko, in theory she should transcend those differences in family origins and be treated as 'Hime' instead... However, there exists people who disagree no matter what."

"I see. So that's where the 'adopted daughter' idea comes from."

Hikari nodded vigorously.

"Just a formal process to allow women not of high-born blood to marry royalty and nobility. With that, the question of family stature goes away."

"However, Yuri should be backed by the support of the History Compilation Committee and Kaoru-san, right?"

Erica interjected as if she completely understood the situation.

"Not if a measure like adoption was not essential? In my opinion, success should be guaranteed if these people resort to this ."

"Ah yes. It is exactly as you say. As expected of Erica-neesama."

Hikari smiled with a giggle and replied cheerfully.

"Our family was also very surprised to find out that Onee-chan was being officially recognized as 'Kusanagi Godou-sama's partner .' This is no joking matter after all."

"A-About being my partner..."

Should he be happy for Yuri or should he be concerned with the problem at hand? Faced with this agonizing problem, Godou's face began to twitch. At the same time, he was feeling increasingly apologetic.

"It's because of me that things have become so complicated. If only Mariya had spoken out herself to let me know. Even someone like me should perhaps start getting used to making use of my power and influence."

"Ah, don't worry, Onii-sama."

Hikari smiled without concern.

"Other than when she's lecturing, Onee-chan is a gentle person. Regarding various issues related to family stature, or whether she would garner jealousy because of her relationship with Onii-sama, Onee-chan does not mind such matters. Because of that, I don't think Onee-chan ever felt like she was suffering."

"That's the Yuri I know. For better or worse, she is a girl unfamiliar with worldly ways."

Just as Erica nodded with a knowing expression...

Yuri and Ena—the two people in question, came out from their room, their harmonious relationship clear to see.

As a side note, Yuri was dressed in casual wear with a white blouse, a cherry-colored cardigan and long skirt. On the other hand, Ena was still in her same old school uniform.

She was also dressed the same when she came to the Kusanagi residence recently. Apparently, expecting this carefree and unfettered Hime-Miko to choose other clothes would be quite a challenge.

"Ah... Originally I was thinking of taking everyone to watch the sunrise for New Year's and enjoying Yuri's cooking, passing time in a relaxed and casual way. Flying some kites or something."

"Well, rice cake soup and red bean porridge can be made any time of the year, you know."[1]

"Really? Then can Ena do New Year's duty at Nanao Shrine together with Yuri and Hikari? Going all the way back to Chichibu would be a pain."

Yuri smiled wryly as she comforted Ena's depressed spirits.

"Well, rather than New Year's, our first priority is getting through today's Great Purification Rite. Even Yuri hates this troublesome work, right?"

"I-It is not really troublesome, but if possible, I would rather not participate..."

Yuri displayed a troubled expression in response to Ena's attempts to recruit her as a spiritual accomplice.

Perhaps this was Godou's first time to witness the Hime-Miko in this manner. Just as Godou felt intrigued, the cellphone in his bag began to vibrate. Godou took it out.

It was a call from the History Compilation Committee's agent, Amakasu Touma.

He had arrived to pick them up.

"Hahahah, to think that the two premier Hime-Miko are thinking of slacking off."

After hearing about the matter, the person laughing frivolously was naturally Amakasu on the driver's seat.

He was driving a minivan to pick up the Mariya sisters and Ena to participate in the Great Purification Rite, as well as Godou, Erica and Liliana who accompanied them.

Carrying everyone, the vehicle followed the Shuto Expressway's loop route to head north to the Saitama prefecture.

"The two premier Hime-Miko? Amakasu Touma, if my memory serves me right, that should be—"

Hearing his statement just now, Liliana spoke up.

"I remember the title of the premier Hime-Miko belongs to Seishuuin Ena alone."

"Yes. Up until recently, that was indeed correct. However, Yuri-san's powers have rapidly developed over the past half a year , and more importantly she is also one of the Hime-Miko with the closest relationship with Kusanagi-san. Hence, Kaoru-san said '

Given these circumstances, it is enough to crown her with any title for a promotion stunt' and thus it was decided with this reasoning. "

"I-I had no idea all this was happening..."

As Amakasu disclosed this was what happened behind the scenes, Yuri shyly lowered her head.

"A person of my position, is truly not worthy of such a grand title..."

"What does it matter? This is part of Kaoru-san's open-mindedness."

"B-Besides, for two people to hold the title of premier, that is truly a strange use of the Japanese language."

"Hahaha, oh well whatever."

Yuri voiced her objections as Amakasu laughed foolishly. Sitting beside him, Erica spoke up and questioned:

"Could this be why Yuri does not want to participate in the ceremony this year? You're embarrassed about the new title?"

"That is also partially the reason."

As Yuri bowed her head deeper, Godou went "Also?" in doubt.

Snickering on the side, the driver Amakasu touched on the issue:

"I think you should understand once you get a basic view of the ceremonial site. Well, it's not like I don't understand the feeling. Frankly speaking, if I were in the same position as Yuri-san and the other Hime-Miko, even someone like me would think the prospects suck in many ways!"

Such suggestive words.

Part 3

The shrine being used for the ceremonial site was located within the ward of Midori-ku in Saitama city, the prefectural capital.

Although the area was quite close to the city center, this massive zone of undeveloped greenery, covering over a thousand hectares, consisted of farmland, mixed forests, grassy wetlands, channels across vast marshes, preserving a spectacular and rich natural environment.

Furthermore, standing alone amidst the expanse of natural scenery was this ancient shrine of Musashino.

The historical site was surrounded by forest and bordered a park. Abundant but not ostentatious, the greenery provided people with a place to rest their minds and bodies.

The deity worshiped at the shrine was Susanoo's wife, Kushinada-Hime, thus explained Amakasu.

Within the vast territory of the shrine, roughly fifty girls dressed in miko outfits were gathered. They appeared quite lively as they chatted happily with one another.

Hikari was also mixed within this group, but Godou could not find Yuri, Ena or Sayanomiya Kaoru in their midst.

Also, standing around the various Hime-Miko were roughly ten-odd men in suits. They appeared to be Amakasu's colleagues and staff of the History Compilation Committee.

Godou and his group walked to a slightly further place to observe the situation.

Along the way, he found Hikari looking at him with a smile. Godou nodded in acknowledgement.

"These girls are Yuri and Ena's comrades... All fellow Hime-Miko, right?"

Erica posed a question. Naturally, it was directed towards Amakasu.

"Yes. However, the majority are apprentice Hime-Miko like Hikari-san. Those who possess sufficient ability to be called a real Hime-Miko... Probably number in the twenties roughly. They are stationed as miko at various strategic locations of spiritual power distributed across Japan."

"Speaking of which, I recall Mariya Yuri mentioning this was a ' festival for miko belonging to the East.'"

Amakasu nodded in response to Liliana's murmurs.

"You are correct. 'West'... Refers to a similar festival held at Shizuoka where various miko from that region gather. On the other hand, Yuri-san is a Hime-Miko of Musashino, the strategic region established after Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu's entry into Edo. Basically, it covers Tokyo and Saitama, as well as parts of Kanagawa and Chiba."

Amakasu supplemented further to explain what the region of Musashino referred to.

"If Kunikida Doppo-sensei[2] were still alive, he'd probably throw a massive fit to find out about this division of regions. The History Compilation Committee was essentially defined in this non-deliberate manner. Not counting apprentices, Hime-Miko belonging to Musashino... Probably number seven or eight."

The great literary author just mentioned would surely have declared angrily that 'Musashino only reaches the Tama River, Hachiouji does not belong in Musashino!'

Just as this thought crossed Godou's mind, Liliana looked over at the Hime-Miko group and commented.

"Over in Europe, having miko potential is equivalent to possessing a witch's disposition. The same probably applies to the Hime-Miko as well, right?"

"Yes. For example, if Yuri-san or Ena-san were to train seriously and successfully reached fruition, then very likely they could turn out into a witch like you, Liliana-san. However, the History Compilation Committee has no wish for the Hime-Miko to cultivate that sort of power."

"Why?"

"Specialization. In order to achieve substantial results, learning witchcraft would require spending at least a decade studying abroad in the place of origin, namely, in eastern or southern Europe. Besides, the Hime-Miko have many other dispositions. For example, take Yuri-san's spirit vision or Ena-san's divine possession."

"Are they all spirit powers originating from the blood of the Divine Ancestors?"

Liliana muttered. Amakasu deliberately winked in response.

"Oh my, did I ever mention that before?"

"No. I am simply speculating on my own. Ever since meeting Princess Alice and Guinevere-sama, I started noticing the similarity in powers compared to the Hime-Miko."

"How about this? In the past, the Divine Ancestors' bloodline was passed down to modern Japan through their descendants."

Hearing Liliana's speculation, Erica inserted herself into the conversation.

"Learning of this fact through some manner, the people of that time carefully preserved the rare bloodline of the Divine Ancestors by influencing the marriages of the Hime, thus they succeeded in maintaining the bloodline to modern times. —The fruits of these efforts are the Hime-Miko, am I right?"

"Since you've already met those Divine Ancestor ladies, indeed, you would notice that intuitively."

Smiling wryly, Amakasu expressed agreement. Speaking of which, Godou recalled a certain memory.

In the Netherworld, the Princess of Glass had told him something similar...

"Well, those who inherited the rare bloodline are the Hime-Miko indeed. The Committee hopes to raise as much as possible their spirit powers stemming from that blood. In this regard, Ena-san and Yuri-san can be considered the two at the pinnacle. —Oh, here they come."

This was the ancient shrine known as the "First Tier Shrine of Musashi Province" in the past.

Three Hime-Miko came out from the worship hall.

Yuri and Ena, as well as Sayanomiya Kaoru.

These miko were dressed differently from usual. On top of their white robes and hakama, they also wore a thin upper garment—the *chihaya*. Their heads were also adorned with glamorous diadems and hairpins.

They stood out in stark contrast to the other Hime-Miko whose style consisted of just the white robe and the hakama.

Also, the man's priestly garb—Eh? Godou was taken aback by what he saw.

There should be three Hime-Miko exiting the worship hall. Ena and Yuri who had been bestowed the premier title, as well as Sayanomiya Kaoru who was slated to be the next chairman of the History Compilation Committee.

However, the last person was not dressed in miko attire. Instead , Kaoru was dressed as a man, wearing a Shinto priest's attire.

"Even on an occasion like this, she still cross-dresses...?"

"Well, this was her personal request, and besides, no one wants to see her dressed as a female... All the other Hime-Miko are very pleased about this."

Amakasu replied to Godou's mutters.

Indeed, Kaoru was a very popular person. As soon as she came out onto the grounds, all the other Hime-Miko gathered delightfully before her. Like a bunch of fans crowding around an idol.

Surrounded by these young girls, Kaoru stood out greatly as she responded to the incessant greetings with a cheerful smile. It felt like she could instantly get into a certain talent agency whose name started with "J" without any difficulty at all.[3]

Kaoru was not the only popular one. Ena was also surrounded by the other Hime-Miko. Likewise for the meek Yuri.

Surrounded by these lively and bustling girls, Ena was responding uncharacteristically with a "this is so troublesome" attitude. But viewed from another perspective, it was apparent that she was the "cool mysterious beauty with long black hair."

As for Yuri, it was readily apparent that she was not very used to these kinds of situations.

Every time someone greeted her she would return the greeting solemnly, pondering nonstop how she should respond, sometimes getting frantic when she could not react fast enough, always standing in the same spot...

Amakasu remarked as he watched the noisy crowds of Hime-Miko.

"I guess the sight of Rosa Foetida, Rosa Gigantea, and Rosa Chinensis en bouton would pretty much be like this..."[4]

"W-What is the meaning of your incantation?"

Liliana questioned the special agent who uttered suspicious words.

"Also, Mariya Yuri looks really pitiful. Is anyone going to help her—"

"Not me. Besides, I'm pushing thirty already. So I don't really have what it takes to penetrate a crowd of girls ranging from teenaged to their twenties. Ah, by the way, once these Hime-Miko reach a certain age, they are allowed to resign from their miko duties. Once they reach that stage, they become active as consultants for the Committee."

As Amakasu tried to evade the question by offering useless trivia, Godou directed a question at him.

"So this is why Mariya didn't want to come?"

"Yes, because Kaoru-san is this kind of person, she is always popular whether in a girls school or any other place. As for Ena-san, due to her abilities meriting the title of the premier Hime-Miko as well as the prestige of the Seishuuin family, she was already popular amongst the Hime-Miko very early on. Then there is Yuri-san... Who has achieved this result through various developments."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh dear. The Hime-Miko residing in Tokyo, Mariya Yuri-san who stands as the partner of the Campione, Mr. Kusanagi Godou.

Rumors have spread of how she has repeatedly received favorable treatment from various areas. Through various individuals privy to the situation, things have been publicized amongst all sorts of people related to the world of magic."

Hearing that it was related to himself, Godou went "Eh" in surprise.

"And Kusanagi-san, you have been greatly active in a manner that greatly exceeded initial expectations. Incinerating the Tokyo Tower, opening up a crater at Nikkou, smashing the Yokohama Bay Bridge... You are the number one celebrity and source of gossip in our field. Yuri-san is widely known to others as the ' woman' belonging to this celebrity."

"In other words, then—"

"Those related to the field would regard Yuri-san as equivalent to the first lady of a major country. 'An amazing princess lives in Tokyo' is the rumor that has spread throughout the Hime-Miko. In the blink of an eye, her popularity had already sky rocketed to such heights."

Amakasu grinned as he spoke.

"Furthermore, what's surprising is that instead of hiding behind the great Devil King, Yuri-san is a very capable person in her own right. Also, her powers have grown to the point where she merits the premier title. Due to all of these various factors, this is the result."

"B-Basically, it's because of me..."

"Yes. Or perhaps one should say, ninety percent or so."

Dealt a final blow by Amakasu's smiling words, Godou felt like collapsing.

"Well... It's not a bad idea to experience all sorts of situations beforehand, though it is a role that doesn't suit Yuri very well. Smiling to the guests like the mistress of a ball."

Erica smiled wryly as she commented.

Godou agreed with her. Perhaps—

Maybe not just Yuri, but also Erica and Liliana beside him, as well as Ena in all her cheerfulness, all these girls might have been forced to shoulder unnecessary hardship because of Kusanagi Godou?

Met with this notion, Godou could not help but feel rather dispirited.

Not long after that, the Great Purification Rite started.

As the ceremonial site, the ancient shrine's surroundings had already been sealed off by the History Compilation Committee's staff, restricting entry for this particular day.

The cold winter wind blew through the greenery of the mixed forest that surrounded the vast grounds of the shrine.

These final days of December truly lived up to their name. Mercilessly cold wind robbed the warmth from people's skin. However, despite wearing only a flimsy miko outfit, none of the Hime-Miko showed any reaction on their faces.

Solemn ritual prayers were offered, followed by an elegantly flowing dance to sacred Shinto music, the kagura.

Miko accomplished in swordsmanship wielded wooden swords for group performances. Other miko displayed their prodigious prowess with bows and arrows.

The focus of these rituals who made sure they proceeded smoothly were still the trio as before.

Sayanomiya Kaoru. Together with the two premier Hime-Miko, Yuri and Ena.

The first to wield a sword of unvarnished wood was Ena as part of the group sword performance. Yuri on the other hand, was performing the sacred kagura dance in the center amongst the miko. The one who led the ritual prayers and took charge of directing everyone's duties was Kaoru.

Godou was particularly surprised by Kaoru's highly skilled marksmanship with archery. Repeatedly, she shot the target's center with spectacular hundred percent accuracy. Now that he thought about it, Godou did recall someone telling him that " Kaoru was equally accomplished in literary and martial arts."

Furthermore, other than these three, the rest of the Hime-Miko were also participating and proceeding with the Great Purification Rite with earnest solemnity.

The earlier commotion seemed like it was nothing but a dream. True to their status as Hime who were carefully selected, this was a gathering of the top elite.

Finally after two hours or so, the Great Purification Rite came to an end without incident.

"In other words, the gathering is purely for a ritual festivities rather than a magical ceremony."

Liliana concluded after watching the ritual from beginning to end. Amakasu responded wryly.

"Please don't compare this with the gatherings of witches. This is where the various miko gather to ritually cleanse themselves of the impurities accumulated over the past year. This will continue to be repeated once a year. I suppose gathering all the Hime-Miko together also has a purpose of cultivating solidarity and harmony between them. After this, there's the garden party."

"By garden party, umm, do you mean it takes place in a residence somewhere?"

Godou reacted with surprise as he heard Amakasu's unexpected announcement.

"I'm serious. Let's keep the explanation simple. That is precisely the kind of feeling you get at the scene. In any case, this serves as a year-end party."

"But before that... We should be doing something else, right?"

Erica pointed out in response to Amakasu's explanation. She was completely correct.

This was the whole reason why they made their appearance at the Hime-Miko gathering.

After the Great Purification Rite, they were going to meet Haya Susanoo no Mikoto—Ena's guardian deity and the Old One who controlled Japan's wizardry scene from the shadows.

Godou was invited here in particular to be the witness to the occasion.

Part 4

"By mobilizing all our members of the East's Hime-Miko to hold a Shinto ritual, a state is achieved where all filth and evil presences in the shrine's vicinity are purified and driven out to a greater extent than usual. Such circumstances allow for the descent of divine spirits from the Netherworld."

Walking ahead to lead everyone else, Kaoru explained to Godou.

"Although Ena contacts the Netherworld occasionally through her cellphone, nothing can be done if the Old One decides to ignore her. Hence, if a portion of his divine spirit is summoned over here, direct dialogue is possible."

"If Godou is the negotiator, the other party cannot dismiss him completely."

"Yes. Indeed that is the situation here."

As Erica chimed in, Kaoru nodded and smiled.

Watching this scene unfold, Godou was struck deeply by this thought. These two highly competent girls only displayed such expressions whenever they were carrying out some nefarious scheme...

After the Great Purification Rite, Godou and his group were now heading towards a grassy clearing neighboring the shrine being used for the ceremonial grounds.

With Kaoru and Godou in the lead, Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena followed in tow. As for Amakasu, he had already left the shrine, saying "I have preparatory work to do for the garden party."

"This area should be fine. Well then, Ena, and Yuri too... Let's start."

Walking all the way to a wide open space, Kaoru then called out to her fellow Hime-Miko.

The two girls nodded and walked up to her. Then the three Hime-Miko began to offer prayers.

"Hereby with humble reverence, appealing to the Great God of Susa..."

"Herein these sacred grounds of Musashino Shrine, exorcised and purified, a stately offering..."

"To proffer endless admiration and praise to your divine grace and virtue..."

The three Hime-Miko raised their magical power as they appealed to Susanoo for his descent. Then halfway through, Ena threw Godou a glance. Discovering her intent, Godou relaxed himself. Residing in his right arm, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi—the steel that once stood as Susanoo's beloved sword, manifested in Ena's hand.

"O divine blade of Ama no Murakumo. I beseech you to call for your former master, Susa's Old One, imploring him to manifest here in this place!"

Lending the power of the divine sword, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, Ena implored her guardian deity to appear.

Immediately afterwards, gusts of wind suddenly began to rampage all around.

Grass and branches shook as the atmosphere trembled with a great rumble. In addition, the wild gusts of wind brought forth a

merciless chill upon Godou and his group, robbing their bodies of their warmth.

Soon after, the voice of a familiar old man was heard from the strong gusts of wind.

'Making such a noisy racket without end, hey.'

This voice belonged to Susanoo, the god whom Godou had faced several times in a storm-battered mountain.

At the same time, Godou felt his body overflow with power for battle. Due to a god—or rather, a portion descending upon the earth, Godou's body of a Campione's had entered a state of battle.

'Stop shouting nonstop to summon an old man who lives in seclusion. After all, coming over to this side is quite inconvenient.'

Godou took a step forward and yelled at the sky.

"I'm sorry, but we have questions for you."

'I thought so too. Oh well, it has been somewhat amusing for me, watching from up high as you people scurry about all over the place. That's something you people can't do in the real world.'

Susanoo could barely stifle the snickering suddenly spilling out from his simmering voice. Godou frowned.

"I knew you were playing dumb while being fully aware of everything."

Ever since Athena's second attack, Ena had attempted many times to contact her "grampsy" to inquire about the "King of the End" and the Heavenly Reverse Halberd.

However, she was completely ignored every time.

'Hold your temper. Regarding that brat, I cannot publicize too much. A god living in seclusion is still a god after all. Imparting knowledge from the Domain of Immortality to the real world is prohibited. What we gods prioritize above all else is the balance between this world and yours.'

Susanoo basically gave a vague excuse to dodge the issue.

The Domain of Immortality. A term Godou had heard mentioned a number of times in the past. It was apparently the place where the gods of myths resided, that was how Godou always felt the term could be understood.

Furthermore, the place where ordinary humans lived on earth was the so-called Domain of Life...

The realm sandwiched between these two worlds was the " Boundary of Life and Immortality." Human magi called this realm the Netherworld or the Astral Plane—

"However, a thousand years ago, didn't you guys seal up that ' King of the End' guy?"

'He was not sealed. Rather, after that brat ran off to fall into deep slumber due to exhaustion, we simply switched the location

where he sleeps. However, it is probably about time for our little trick to lose effectiveness.'

A god's aloof tone increased in Susanoo's voice.

'Since things have come to this, we whose fates are predetermined should not interfere excessively in various affairs on earth. As well as all sorts of other reasons. Hence, Ena was ignored.'

"That's what I thought too. Indeed, it is a course of action very much in line with how grampsy would think!"

Hearing her guardian deity's explanation, the Hime-Miko of the Sword shrugged.

'Hold your peace. Thus, Ena, you should stop pursuing this matter henceforth. The one we have hidden away, that troublesome—that brat shall be left for you people to handle... Oh well, as a result of the previous round of commotion, even that brat has unambiguously conveyed his intent to stay true to the " lazybones" title.'

Susanoo's voice issued a stern order then became relaxed again.

'The meddlesome outsiders not only failed to rouse that brat from his slumber, but also caused a whole pile of messy affairs. Even so, these kinds of fellows will continue to keep popping up!'

Outsiders—Indeed, the divine ancestors apparently still had other comrades.

Thinking that, Godou sighed.

'Besides, the brat should have slept for over a thousand years already. If he were going to wake up, perhaps there is a particular time and place for it. That is called destiny.'

"Hey hey..."

Just as Godou grumbled at these irresponsible words, Kaoru suddenly stepped up.

Until now, everyone apart from Godou and Ena had refrained from speaking to Susanoo in fear of his divine splendor. But at this moment, Kaoru took action.

Under the gaze of everyone apart from Susanoo, Kaoru knelt down and bowed her head.

"In that case, Old One, I have a matter I would like to inquire."

'Oh?'

"Since the Old One harbors such ideas, we have decided to look up to Kusanagi Godou as our leader and protector henceforth, allowing us to take action as subordinates under his banner first and foremost—That is our humble opinion. Regarding this proposal, what are your thoughts, Old One?"

Currently holding the title of the Tokyo Branch Chief, Kaoru was poised as the next leader of the History Compilation Committee.

But in actual fact, her position commanded the entire core leadership of the Committee in the Kantou region. Thus the androgynous Hime-Miko threw out such a shocking proposal.

Erica and Liliana exchanged sharp glances while Yuri and Ena were rendered speechless.

Speaking of Godou, he was blinking repeatedly in puzzlement. What exactly were Kaoru's intentions?

As for the ancient god who had descended together with violent wind—

'Fine with me.'

A curt answer.

'I have no interest in knowing what kinds of cliques and associations the people on earth wish to make. If that is indeed what you mean, all I can say is, be my guest. You people on earth, whether you wish to obey my orders or to ignore them by relying on the god-slayer as a shield, it is a matter up to you to decide—together with this Kusanagi Godou here.'

Downright readily, Susanoo was approving Kaoru's proposal.

Having obtained assurance, Kaoru continued to kneel on the ground, bowing her head deeper in reverence.

Then the wild winds rapidly weakened. The power surging from within Godou's body for battle also diminished. Susanoo's divine spirit had apparently left the location already.

"Oh dear. Say, in the past half a year, hasn't Godou-san become our king already in all but name?"

After Susanoo left, Ena asked "What was that about?"

Kaoru replied nonchalantly:

"Considering Godou-san's personality, this situation isn't going to change substantially from now on. So in preparation for future emergencies, I think we need to have a certain someone ascend to the throne."

"Th-Throne?"

Kaoru winked at Godou who was shocked by the usage of that questionable word.

"Basically, I'm referring to Godou-san's status and position. Fighting battles according to your will, assisting friends, sometimes bringing disaster to this world and nation, other times offering protection instead—This is a position only afforded to the king."

"Then doesn't this mean, compared to grampsy, His Majesty is even more amazing?"

Ena commented with a happy smile while Kaoru responded with a malevolent smile of her own.

"Compared to a god living secluded in the great spiritual world, it is only inevitable and natural that power and influence is wielded by the king on earth, is that not so? Oh well, this is the best decision. In preparation for future needs."

"Indeed that is true..."

Liliana nodded vigorously.

"If the hero of salvation really sleeps in Tokyo's vicinity, it would not be strange for [Heretic Gods] and other Campiones to be drawn here."

"But Kaoru-san."

Yuri brought up her concerns with a worried expression.

"If you move ahead with this proposal, which is tantamount to holding the Old One's power and influence in contempt, even ignoring those of our generation for now, the elderly are certain to raise objections..."

"They can object as much as they want. After all, it amounts to nothing more than grumbling."

"Because we hold the absolute trump card, the god-slaying Devil King on our side. For ordinary mortals, rallying resistance against a Campione would be no different from suicide."

Erica concluded as if summing things up.

"Because it's Kaoru-san we're talking about, you're sure to take great initiative in apparently troublesome areas."

"Well well. However, it would be quite interesting to sweep away all hindrances of the past to simply start a new venture in one fell swoop."

New venture. Yet another unsettling term was mentioned.

Presumably due to the expression of unease on his face, Kaoru turned to face Godou in his shocked confusion.

"Oh dear. In the near future, I will be using the Tokyo area as Godou-san's stronghold to take on the venture of building Kusanagi Godou's kingdom. I'm sure it will be a very interesting job. Godou-san, if you agree, may I refer to you as GM (General Manager)?"

An excellent job indeed, Kaoru smiled as she spoke.

"B-By kingdom you mean..."

"Gathering up the talent around you, Godou, to establish a new association. I'm fairly certain Lily and I can transfer our allegiances smoothly. All sorts of preparations are already underway."

"As for me, Yuri and Ena... Or even the entire History Compilation Committee, it feels like everyone pretty much owes allegiance to the houses of Sayanomiya and Seishuuin. Once these two families are under control, everything goes without a hitch."

Kaoru discussed an unsettling plan as though she were playing an intellectual game.

In response, Liliana made an expression as if she wanted to remark "nefarious scheming again..."

On the other hand, Ena's eyes glowed as though she had heard about some sort of new mischievous prank while Yuri displayed a face full of worry.

As for Godou, he nodded in agreement with Yuri and Liliana while expressing his regrets on behalf of the common sense faction to their excessively radical friends.

Chapter 2 - Journey's Beginning

Part 1

Thus, Susanoo's spirit summoning ritual finally came to an end. Time to part ways—was what Godou originally thought.

"Well then, since we still have the garden party, let's go and get ready. Yuri, Ena, come over to my family's secondary residence."

Sayanomiya Kaoru smiled cheerfully as she addressed her two fellow Hime-Miko.

As soon as they heard her, Yuri expressed fear and wanted to escape while Ena bore a gloomy expression.

"F-Forgive me but I must be excused this year."

"Same for Ena. I don't wanna be in a situation like just now again. So restrictive and bothersome."

"What are you talking about? Given this rare opportunity where all the Hime-Miko are already gathered together, we should further harmonize our relations. This is the time for you two to shine in the lead role, you two premier Hime-Miko."

Kaoru smiled malevolently.

In response, Ena resisted desperately while Godou watched.

"But Ena has never participated before, okay? There's not much point in showing up once for this year only, so why can't I just leave like this?"

"Like I said, since you're already here this year..."

Deflecting Ena's objections, Kaoru smiled at Yuri.

"Ever since it became known that you became Godou-san's romantic partner, Yuri, many people wanted to get closer to you. Not only among the Hime-Miko but also those related to the Committee. You'll be able to meet lots of people at the garden party tonight, wouldn't it be great fun?"

"N-Nothing of that sort. To be surrounded by so many people would be a bit..."

"Please don't say that. These are also duties that come inseparably with the role of the First Lady."

"Wait a minute. I cannot ignore the matter of Mariya Yuri as Kusanagi Godou's legal consort—"

Observing silently all this time, Liliana suddenly interjected.

"I believe you are not the type to take the unwilling away by force. Also, pressing others against their will is not your style."

"My, you really got me good there."

Kaoru smiled wryly in response to Liliana's chivalric rescue.

Godou agreed with Liliana that such behavior did not seem fitting for the gallant and whimsical dandy.

"In actual fact, all of the Hime-Miko would like to hear Ena and Yuri's answers."

"Answers about what?"

"Regarding their husband, as to what kind of person Mr. Kusanagi Godou is like. Also, about the rumored flamboyant lifestyle of His Majesty, in great detail."

Godou was shocked by Liliana and Kaoru's exchange. Why is there a conversation about me!?

"But if this questioning was brought up before the Great Purification Rite, it probably would have prevented the ritual from starting. After all, as Hime-Miko, everyone would show some self-restraint and refrain from such disgraceful behavior. But conversely, I was swarmed by an onslaught of people seeking answers..."

"Regarding whether Mariya Yuri and Seishuuin Ena were going to attend tonight's garden party or the like?"

"Liliana-san, you are completely on the mark. If Yuri and Ena are not brought over to the garden party, my situation could get rather precarious. Also, before returning to their stations, the Hime-Miko might pay visits to Nanao Shrine or Yuri's home to sit down for a chat and some tea with Yuri and Ena. Given the situation, please come over to my home."

"S-Speaking of which, before the ritual started..."

Yuri expressed shock after listening.

"People kept asking me if I was going to attend the garden party ... So those inquiries were about this!"

"Everyone has a burning desire to find out about what's going on between you two and Godou-san."

While Godou was feeling shocked by the unexpected conversation, the girl who had remained silent all this time spoke up.

"Hey Kaoru-san, are those who are not Hime-Miko barred from participation in this gathering?"

Naturally, the questioner was Erica. Kaoru instantly replied:

"No, staff of the History Compilation Committee are allowed to participate, as well as people related to the Four Families and relatives of the Hime-Miko in the area. There shouldn't be a problem."

"Then how about this? All of us will participate. I think it's a great idea."

After the initial shock of Erica's suggestion, Godou gave up on struggling.

Since Yuri and Ena were facing unnecessary troubles because of him, this was the very least he could do to help alleviate their plight—

Hence, 6pm came around on that day.

Kusanagi Godou and his companions were taken by courtesy car to the garden party's venue.

The location was Tokyo's Bunkyo ward, unexpectedly close to the Kusanagi home. A western mansion standing in a quiet greenified area, it clearly exuded the same style as the former XX residence.[5]

A guess would place its construction date during the Meiji period in the nineteenth to early twentieth century. It was a building whose style was retro yet modern at the same time.

The property was equipped with a spacious garden which could have served as a suitable location for the garden party, but due to the winter season, the air outdoors would be too chilly.

Consequently, the main venue today was presumably the banquet hall on the first floor that offered a view of the garden from its windows.

"Well... In order to make Mariya and Seishuuin less conspicuous , perhaps it's best that I show up?"

Having made his decision already, Godou muttered softly to himself.

In a situation like this, especially when arriving in the company of a person with a ridiculous enough title of "Devil King," as much as it was unintended, one would inevitably become the center of public attention, of course.

Several hours earlier, Erica had raised a good point.

'Ultimately, it is because Kusanagi Godou is such a man of mystery that people have no choice but to believe rumors. Attention would be focused on Yuri and Ena who are relatively more approachable. Hence, Godou must make a stately appearance, thereby causing people to behave themselves in fear of the Devil King's mighty name. During the garden party, please stand next to Yuri and Ena.'

As a result, Godou arrived at the venue together with his companions.

Godou was dressed in a suit borrowed from Kaoru's wardrobe. The feeling of the unfamiliar necktie made Godou rather uncomfortable. Having made a trip back home, Erica was now attired in a beautiful crimson formal dress with a black shawl wrap.

Wearing a blue dress with a black corsage, Liliana appeared with magnificence in no way inferior to her rival and longtime friend. On the other hand, the Japanese Hime-Miko were all dressed in kimonos.

Yuri's kimono had a cherry blossom pattern against a light violet background.

This soothing design and color did not feel garish and was rather well-suited to Yuri. As for Ena, hers was a checkered pattern on a white Oshima Tsumugi weave. For the Hime-Miko of the Sword who did not indulge particularly in fashion, there was surprisingly no sense of dissonance in her choice of kimono.

Without giving an impression of trying too hard to be stylish, she was simply wearing it naturally.

"What should I do...?"

"You don't need to do anything. Just lead us inside to make your grand appearance. People will naturally realize who you are."

Already accustomed to such situations, Erica offered her advice.

Really? Unable to relax, Godou entered the great hall. The cocktail party had already begun, with about a hundred attendees present.

Naturally, the young women stood out the most.

There were several dozen Hime-Miko dressed in miko style dresses and kimonos. They were clustered in small groups, chatting away excitedly, but the entire atmosphere changed as soon as Godou made his appearance.

Everyone turned their gaze intently towards him and began to whisper discreetly to their companions beside them.

There were also many men present. Young men, middle-aged men and elderly men from various age brackets.

Watching Godou and his companions, these men also began to converse among themselves discreetly.

But immediately they stopped as if apprehensive for some reason.

"With you leading the two premier Hime-Miko together with Lily and I to make an entry, even if the people here did not recognize your face, they would immediately recall your name."

Erica's words prompted Godou's realization.

It was already widely known that Godou's companions and subordinates included the blonde and silver-haired Caucasian beauties as well as the two famous Hime-Miko.

Exactly as Erica pointed out earlier, these four girls were quite recognizable as a calling card.

Unable to calm his agitation, Godou surveyed the venue.

Not too far away was a table with lots of food laid out as part of a buffet-style offering. There was a bar where alcoholic and soft drinks were served.

"Something to drink?"

Just when Liliana made her suggestion, Erica suddenly spoke up.

"Lily, let's go over there. Come together with me."

"What?"

"Although there is no longer any need to publicize the name of Kusanagi Godou, it is a different matter for us. Now is a perfect opportunity to let it be widely known that the god-slayer is accompanied by the knights from Milan."

"I dislike this sort of method."

Liliana frowned as she replied to the childhood friend in the crimson dress.

"It is enough for the name of Liliana Kranjcar to spread naturally through the passage of time. Promoting oneself is counter to a knight's modesty, and as a person..."

"It matters not for this once. It's also Godou's first time to attend this sort of occasion."

Despite Liliana's refusal, Erica still continued.

"Having more acquaintances and contacts apart from Kaoru-san and Amakasu-san would facilitate getting things done. Besides, if we attract more attention, Yuri and Ena-san will feel more at ease, and so will Godou, obviously."

"...I see."

The female knight in the blue formal dress acted as usual and nonchalantly surveyed the surroundings.

Without a doubt, their group was attracting the most attention. Among them, the most striking one was naturally Kusanagi Godou himself.

As advised earlier, Godou tried to maintain a "calm" state of mind.

But it was also true that he found it impossible to calm down. Even doing something so trivial as getting food to alleviate his hunger brought forth numerous stares.

Eating under everyone's watchful gaze really did lead to indigestion—

"This is also part of a knight's duties, I suppose... Well then, Kusanagi Godou, I shall go with Erica."

"Are you really okay with it?"

Godou asked. Liliana smiled with a chuckle.

"Yes. Although it is not particularly to my liking, I have experienced these sorts of occasions several times before. On further thought, if I leave Erica alone to publicize her name only, it would be a taint to Liliana Kranjcar's reputation."

Hence the red and blue knights parted with Godou.

They moved about in gorgeous formal dresses rather than their usual combat capes.

This fact alone made them quite striking in appearance. Red and blue. The blonde and the silver-haired Caucasian beauties. Individually, they already attracted a great deal of attention. It went without saying that the effect was magnified when they stood together in stark contrast against each other.

Leaving strong impressions on others was only inevitable.

As the two girls walked about, the gazes of the crowd were drawn along with them.

Perhaps this was exactly why Erica chose to take Liliana along with her—

Godou suddenly noticed Yuri and Ena's absence from his side. Taking a further look, he found them by the buffet table, filling their plates with plentiful food.

However, a few nearby Hime-Miko seemed to be engaging Yuri and Ena in conversation. After greeting their fellow Hime-Miko, Yuri and Ena returned with their plates full of food. Godou inquired:

"What were they talking about just now?"

"Hoho, regarding whether the gentleman over there was a certain someone from somewhere."

Yuri smiled mischievously in a rare moment while Ena grinned like a naughty child. They were suddenly inspired with a mood of playfulness. The name of Kusanagi Godou had clearly been mentioned.

"Since we took quite a lot of food, let us share and eat together."

Yuri put down her plate on a neighboring round table.

She had taken one plate while Ena had carried two, one in each hand. Mini roast beef sandwiches, carpaccio, seaweed rolls, dainty little snacks, etc. It seemed to be an unrestricted cocktail party combining Chinese, Japanese and western cuisine.

The two girls, who originally agonized over the prospects of attending this event, currently seemed quite relaxed instead.

This fact alone probably made it worthwhile for him to come. Just as Godou secretly felt gratified, a familiar face approached. It was Hikari.

"Onii-sama, although it's only been a couple hours, I feel like it's been quite a while since we last met!"

Hikari greeted with a joking tone of voice.

She was dressed in an adorable light pink dress. A few hours earlier, after the Great Purification Rite ended, Hikari had left the ceremonial site together with the other Hime-Miko in preparation for the garden party.

"I'm so glad that all my Onee-samas are attending. From the way it looked earlier, I was worried you two would skip out."

"Well, that was what we thought originally..."

"Somehow or other, we were taken here."

Yuri made a faint, wry smile while Ena responded to Hikari as if grumbling.

"But Ena-neesama, it's really great you came together with Onii-sama."

"Really?"

"Yes. Actually, after the Great Purification Rite, everyone was asking me, 'Could the gentleman we saw at the ceremony who just left really be...!?' It was quite troubling. Everyone was so concerned with Onii-sama's true identity..."

Godou felt intimidated. Come to think of it, Erica and Liliana were accompanying him back then at the time.

For those informed about the god-slayer, Kusanagi Godou, but did not know his appearance, guessing his true identity based on the situation was not particularly extraordinary.

"Everyone asked Onee-chan and Ena-neesama all sorts of things with great excitement. All the people were quite shocked that Onii-sama came personally to the venue."

Hikari smiled as she explained.

Part 2

Then an hour passed—

Godou was truly experiencing firsthand the cocktail party effect .[6]

Finally getting used to everyone all dressed up at the garden party, Godou retreated to the edge of the venue. All sorts of conversations about him drifted into his ears.

The attendees were in excitement over the Devil King's sudden appearance—especially among the young Hime-Miko girls.

After calming down somewhat, they started to converse, perhaps a bit too loudly.

"So I knew it, that person is..." "Kusanagi Godou-sama..." "An outstanding Devil King despite such a young age!" "Oh my." " Neither the Roman Colosseum nor the Yokohama Bay Bridge could stand before his splendid might." "Wow, amazing!" "I knew it, those who become Campiones are all extraordinary." "But, the infamy of his lust is known all over the world..." "Those two Italian ladies are said to be Kusanagi-sama's lovers." "Maybe even I too could... It's troubling, but if the great Devil King wishes... Hoo." " Fufu, someone like you will definitely be ignored." "Yuri-san and Ena-san have been serving the king all this time, right?" " Reportedly, they even accompanied him into battles against gods." "How amazing." "Kusanagi-sama looks so kind and gentle on the surface..." "Despite a Devil King's true nature that leads everything

towards destruction, seething and boiling in his heart like magma, he manages to conceal it skillfully!" "Wow, so amazing!"

This was the unusual scene of upper class society known as the garden party.

Godou had previously heard that the Hime-Miko were quintessential highborn ladies.

(After all, as a former house of nobility, the Mariya household was an atypical world, far removed from the "mundane.")

Consequently, Godou was very concerned about the whisperings and lady talk between the Hime-Miko. But oh well, most of the content was like that.

None of the Hime-Miko voiced it directly, most probably in fear of the god-slayer's mighty name, but they were greatly excited to find Godou matching their expectations from rumors.

"This is making me unexpectedly uncomfortable..."

"I-I am truly sorry..."

By Godou's side, Yuri apologized. Ena had taken off ten minutes earlier, saying "I see some people I know!" Thus turning the pair into wallflowers.

"But why does everyone seem so informed about my affairs?"

"That is the obvious result of your position. Furthermore, it stems naturally from your everyday behavior."

Yuri answered Godou's question with a mournful tone of voice.

"It pains me to say this... But I believe the greatest reason why rumors spread far and wide is rooted in yourself, Godou-san."

"R-Really?"

Feeling the slight sigh in the Hime-Miko's words, Godou became flustered.

"As the saying goes, a rumor lasts seventy-five days, but Godou-san always creates new headlines within thirty days, causing all sorts of problems..."

Before one rumor could die down, seeds for another were already sown.

In response to the criticism, Godou went "Ooh..." while feeling mentally exhausted. Recently, it was true that peaceful days never stretched longer than a month. Godou became slightly self-aware.

"Moreover, despite the way you are, Godou-san, as the ones by your side, we not only failed to stop you but even went as far as to assist you with full support..."

Yuri sighed gloomily at her inappropriate conduct.

With her serious personality, Yuri was perhaps rather troubled by the current state of affairs, burdened by Kusanagi Godou's " persistent" perpetration of various atrocities. Godou frantically responded:

"I don't think it's your fault, Mariya. Since all rumors start because of me, therefore all responsibility rests on me too."

"No, as someone who accompanies you along your chosen path, I cannot accept such excuses for myself."

Yuri shook her head with a stern expression.

"We are bound together by one shared fate. Hence, were any incidents or problems to arise from Godou-san's excesses, I feel I must shoulder a portion of your culpability."

"...I'm sorry."

Bound together by one shared fate. Perhaps indeed that was the case.

Since Godou had recently experienced what things would be like without comrades to assist him, he could not help but apologize pensively.

As she watched Godou apologizing, Yuri's facial expression and tone of voice softened.

"Like I said, please do not say it is not my fault, okay? If you do not rely on me, it would imply that I do not belong by your side, Godou-san. And I would hate that."

Yuri looked straight into Godou's eyes and declared quietly:

"Even if it means bringing trouble to all sorts of people, I wish to become Godou-san's source of assistance. In fact, I do understand this kind of wish is quite improper..."

"Mariya..."

Unlike Erica and Ena, Yuri was an extremely serious young lady with a strong sense of responsibility.

Seeing her pledge her support in spite of all that, Godou was touched and overcome with gratitude. Gazing passionately at her, Godou proceeded to smile for some reason.

Feeling the concreteness of the bonds between Yuri and himself, Godou was filled with sincere happiness from the depths of his heart.

On further examination, the Hime-Miko was also smiling in return, presumably experiencing the same feeling. Just as Godou and Yuri nodded at each other, inexplicably certain of each other's thoughts and feelings—

(Wow, look over there, Yuri-san and Kusanagi-sama are gazing passionately into each other's eyes!)

(Fufu, they've completely entered a world of their own!)

(As expected of the world famous Devil King of lust, completely unfazed by our gaze, passionately whispering sweet nothings regardless!)

The private gossiping between the nearby Hime-Miko entered Godou's ears.

Speaking of which, they were still present at the garden party, but Godou and Yuri had unwittingly forgotten.

Suddenly embarrassed, the two of them shifted their gaze away from each other's eyes.

"...E-Everyone was watching us all along."

"...Y-Yeah, that's right. But I don't like having girls staring at me and gossiping."

"...U-Umm, I think this is another result of your usual behavior. A-Although us getting caught up in the moment here on site is also problematic, Godou-san, the real reason stems from your extraordinary displays in female relationships after all."

"...W-Where have all the others gone!?"

In an attempt to prevent the conversation from drifting towards a dangerous direction, Godou asked frantically.

Erica and Liliana had not yet returned. Taking a further look, he found the knights together with Kaoru who was dressed in her

usual suit. They were apparently introducing themselves to those related to the Committee and the Four Families, to publicize their names and appearances.

Erica chatted amiably while Liliana stood sternly beside her. Even from a distance, the scene was quite striking.

On the other hand, Seishuuin Ena was—

"Oh look, Ena-san is over there talking to people."

Turning his gaze towards the direction Yuri indicated, Godou was surprised to find Ena conversing with an all-male group.

Their ages ranged from young to old with all sorts. The majority sported short haircuts. Given the positive attitudes displayed, Godou felt that they carried themselves with an air of martial artists.

All members of the group seemed familiar with Ena and they conversed with bright smiles.

Discovering Godou's gaze, Ena smiled back at him and going " Well then, time's up I guess!" to take her leave from the all-male group.

Finally, Ena bowed her head reverently towards the oldest man in the group.

This elderly man resembled Bodhidharma in both appearance and in his slightly chubby build.[7] There was an incredibly

dignified air about him. While the rest of the group were dressed in suits, he was the only one wearing a kimono.

When their gazes met, Godou nodded as a greeting. This prompted the old man to greet in return, bowing his head deeply at a right angle.

Rather than being influenced by the notorious infamy of the god-slayer and Devil King, it seemed more like it was his own nature to attach great importance to etiquette and respect. Indeed, a man pursuing the martial path?

"I'm back. I saw some acquaintances so I went over to greet them."

"That's what I figured. Who are those people?"

Godou inquired as Ena returned, who smiled and answered:

"Instructors of swordsmanship. They taught Ena and Amakasu-san all sorts of things. Normally, they are active over at the History Compilation Committee or the police. Sometimes they serve as acting masters at dojos. All kinds of different situations."

"Oh just as I guessed. So these people came as well..."

"The instructor who resembles Bodhidharma is especially amazing. Limited to swordsmanship alone, he is probably around the same level as Her Eminence in China."

"On Nee-san's level!? That's really amazing."

If the Miko of the Sword judged so, it was probably true.

Seeing Godou greatly impressed, Ena went "Anyway, that aside ..." and remarked:

"From what the instructors said, there's a place to rest upstairs where few people go... Don't you feel it's about time we leave?"

Ena made her suggestion with a mischievous look.

Godou exchanged glances with Yuri beside him and nodded quietly.

Ten-odd minutes later.

Godou, Yuri and Ena were taking a break on the third floor.

Not only were there sofas here but also long tables. Having suitably refilled their plates with food on their way out, they would be able to rest here for quite a while.

Finally, there was some peace and quiet to enjoy their food. Taking up their chopsticks and forks, Godou and Ena began to eat without needing to be concerned about manners.

Yuri's appetite was nowhere near as vigorous as those two, but still she ate from time to time.

"I knew it... Eating as usual feels the best..."

Godou exclaimed emphatically. Smiles blossomed on Yuri and Ena's faces.

"Oh right, by the way, Your Majesty, about that matter."

Godou was puzzled by Ena's unexpected words. That matter? He had no idea at all.

Ena pouted with displeasure in response.

"I knew it... You forgot after all because too many things happened? Think back. About what you said regarding when Ena returns from recuperating at the ancestral home—and I requested so explicitly too."

"!" Godou recalled with alarm, feeling as if his body had been struck by lightning.

Just before the battle against Lancelot, he had made a promise in order to compel Ena to stay at the hospital. Unable to refuse her at the time, Godou had bid Ena farewell after responding vaguely.

After going through the commotions of Alec and the war god of the lance, the issue was brought up again—

"S-Seishuuin, umm, how should I say this?"

"Ena mentioned before, I'll wait for as long as it will take. That's why I tried as much as possible not to say anything, waiting for Your Majesty to bring up the subject first."

The Miko of the Sword was speaking with an expression like an angry child. Listening on the side, Yuri was tilting her head in puzzlement.

"What kind of promise did Godou-san make with Ena-san?"

"Oh Yuri, you should really listen to this. His Majesty is so terrible, well..."

Saying that, Ena began to whisper in her childhood friend's ear.

"K-K-Kiss!? Godou-san, why did you make that kind of promise !?"

"B-Before I could come up with a good way to refuse, it was time to depart for London... Then I forgot about it."

"This is a huge issue. There are no excuses for excessive thoughtlessness!"

Oh well. This was yet another common scene.

For the most part, the trio passed their time happily and leisurely—

"Ah, so you guys are here. Looks like you managed to find sanctuary."

The new arrival was Amakasu.

He was dressed as usual in his creased suit, a sight rather unsuited to the grandness of the occasion.

"Ah yes, we are taking a break here because there are apparently no other people. Hoho, it does feel a little strange."

Having calmed down from her ferocious indignation earlier, Yuri smiled. Amakasu grinned wryly.

"That's because the great Devil King has taken two beautiful ladies to this place for some fun, right, so all the people will not dare approach. Because they know Kusanagi-sama and his girls are here."

"Eh? Is that the reason why!?"

Yuri displayed shock while Godou and Ena were also surprised . As the three stared with their eyes wide, the wryness in Amakasu's expression deepened.

"Indeed. But oh well, even if you three are not present, Erica-san and Liliana-san downstairs have taken the spotlight tonight. Isn't that great?"

Saying that, Amakasu sat down on an empty sofa as well.

He was holding a tablet PC in his hand, a rather inappropriate device at a banquet. Noticing Godou's gaze, Yuri and Ena followed suit. Amakasu began to operate the tablet's touchscreen.

"Just as you noticed here, I'll cut straight to the chase. — Yuri-san, as usual, we need to borrow your spirit vision powers again, so please lend us your assistance."

"Of course, no problem at all... But it is possible I might not see anything."

Despite Yuri's commendably fantastic spirit vision powers, she always maintained a conservative assessment of her abilities.

But precisely because she always remained humble and modest, the spirit power of clairvoyance could be maintained at the highest level. Conversely, one could probably take her current disclaimer as evidence of her powers.

"Yeah, that would be enough already. After that, I'd like to invite Kusanagi-san..."

"Me too?" Godou widened his eyes. Amakasu laughed.

"Don't you want to try out Cape Inubou's famous New Year's specialty, the anglerfish hot pot?[8] Of course, not just Yuri-san, everyone else is invited together."

Saying that, Amakasu showed the tablet's screen to Godou and the rest.

A news program on One-Seg[9] television was starting. Entering into view was—The Tokyo Tower. Several months earlier, this red and white tower of steel had caught fire as a result of Godou's battle against Marquis Voban.

This matter was about to lead Godou and his group towards the ocean, to begin a new journey.

A tumultuous curtain raising was taking place just as the new year was rolling in around the corner.

Part 3

The following morning after the garden party, Godou started preparing to go on a journey.

Shizuka had already left the day before to spend New Year's at their father's place in the Caribbean, leaving Godou completely alone this morning. Carrying his luggage—a sports bag—on his back, Godou set off from home at nine o' clock sharp.

Today's place for meeting up was Nanao Shrine at Toranomon Station.

But Godou did not head there directly. Taking the subway, Godou first went to the Tokyo Tower at Shiba Park, the place where he had battled a fellow peer and Campione back in June.

The Tokyo landmark, which had been enveloped in flames by that battle, was repainted red and white over the various scorched and blackened portions to match its original appearance. There was a certain atmosphere hanging around like that of a building destroyed by war.

For Godou, this was a fateful location he was obliged to visit in contrition.

Today, there were quite a lot of people around the Tokyo Tower as though there was some kind of temple fair. Extremely crowded

and lively. Many of these people probably came specifically for the view just like Godou.

All the people were looking up. Originally 333m tall, the Tokyo Tower's current height was clearly shorter than that.

The antenna and the top of the tower originally found above the special observation deck at 250m had been destroyed, resulting in the current abysmal state. All the people gathered here, including Godou, were staring at this tragic sight.

"Despite that ridiculous ordeal the old gramps and I put the Tokyo Tower through, it still managed to keep its original shape huh..."

Of the surrounding people, some were rendered speechless while others took out their digital cameras. Fear, anger, all sorts of reactions could be observed among the crowd.

Out of all of them, Godou was the only one sighing as he left the Tokyo Tower. This time, he actually made his way to Nanao Shrine. As a side note, the antenna and the pinnacle portion of the tower were destroyed yesterday at noon during the Great Purification Rite.

'Without any warning, vanished without trace like magic. Please take a look because headlines like "Sudden Collapse Incident!?" are being reported through mass media.'

Last night, Amakasu had explained while showing the evening news through the tablet PC.

'Although a terrorist demolition was suspected at first, no sounds of collapse or explosion could be confirmed. Neither were any fragments found near the Tokyo Tower. It's almost like it was " disintegrated" completely.'

'Through the investigations conducted by us at the Committee, the actual cause was determined to be a particular incident.'

'A sniping attack.'

During the instant of occurrence, cameras were fortunately able to capture something. Something had flown from the east and embedded itself into the topmost part of the Tokyo Tower, then during the instant when the antenna and the top of the tower disappeared—

Godou recalled Amakasu's words as he stepped into Nanao Shrine. Everyone else had arrived already—Yuri and Ena dressed in miko outfits, as well as Erica and Liliana. Amakasu was absent because he was already dispatched to the scene the night before.

"We have been waiting, Godou-san. Please come this way."

As the Hime-Miko protecting this shrine, Yuri did not need to perform that role on this rare occasion.

The whole group made their way into the depths of the shrine to find a mysterious "arrow" laid on a blue tarpaulin. A two-meter long arrow made of steel—a steel arrow.

"This thing... There really is some sort of divine quality residing in it."

Liliana murmured as she looked at the long and massive steel arrow. Possessing both the power of spirit vision and the knowledge of witches, her appraisal ability far surpassed typical magi in situations like the current one.

"This is the arrow that struck the Tokyo Tower?"

"Yes. Investigators discovered it when they tracked down the immense magical power lingering behind. Although I have no idea how much I can see, I shall make an attempt to 'have a look.'"

Yuri answered Godou's question solemnly.

Meanwhile, Erica and Ena commented as they looked at the steel arrow.

"It carries a divine quality just as expected. This is yet another fairly troublesome incident."

"Well, it is definitely impossible for a human to snipe from the location Amakasu said, no matter what kind of spell was used. So this time, a bow-wielding deity appeared?"

Ena's unintentional comment gave Godou a shock for some reason. He recalled an old unexpected enemy—the name of Perseus. Because that man also used a bow and arrows, right? Unaware of Godou's reminiscences at this time, Yuri lifted up the iron arrow in her pale white hand.

In possession of excellent spirit vision powers, she closed her eyes and began to speak in broken sentences.

"Bow and arrows forged from steel. The brave warrior who carries this bow. Peerless arm strength... Relentless, unyielding... The one shouldering a fate of wandering."

As expected of Yuri, her spirit vision was successful.

"Traversing the great sea and hundreds of islands, finally returning to his homeland... Piercing his enemies with arrows, recovering his beautiful wife... His name... His name is..."

Could it really be Perseus? Godou could feel his emotions roused in turmoil.

Did that flashy and conspicuous guy come to Japan to seek revenge? However, if it were really him, he would have made a more direct entrance instead—

As Godou pondered while he waited for the oracle, Yuri opened her eyes.

"This is apparently all there is to it. Spirit vision did not succeed in revealing the god's sacred name hidden in the arrow."

"You've done very well already. A lot can be imagined based on the many things you saw through spirit vision."

Ena comforted her fellow Hime-Miko who hung her head in disappointment.

"That's right... Ena is reminded of 'Yuriwaka Daijin,' what about you, Yuri?"[10]

"I cannot say. Although a lot can indeed be deduced, but if these eyes of mine really cannot see it through spirit vision then..."

Apparently, Yuri insisted on capturing the deity through feeling rather than knowledge and deductive logic.

Impressed with the answer of the miko who possessed excellent spirit vision powers, Godou spoke up:

"I'm sorry, but what kind of god is that whatever 'Daijin' guy?"

"It's not unusual for ordinary people to have never heard of him . He used to be quite famous as the protagonist of a legend, which was even made into a *kabuki* drama."

Yuri immediately supplemented Ena's answer:

"Yuriwaka Daijin's legend is an amalgamation of all sorts of beliefs from all over Japan. Not only is the eagle serving him worshiped, but even his bow and arrows are venerated in shrines as divine treasures."

"Just think of him as a mythical hero. Yeah, similar to Sun Wukong from before."

And so, the two Hime-Miko briefly recounted the legend of Yuriwaka Daijin.

'Yuriwaka Daijin was the provincial overseer at Kyushu Tsukushi, renowned for his bravery and mastery of the bow.

After participating in an overseas military expedition, he was betrayed by his subordinate along the way home and abandoned on a desert island in the middle of the ocean. Upon returning to Yuriwaka's territory, his subordinate took over and did as he pleased unchecked.

And even married Yuriwaka's wife Kasugahime by force.

But Yuriwaka escaped from the desert island and endured years of long travel, finally returning to his homeland. Using his bow to shoot and kill the traitorous subordinate, he recovered his wife and territory...'

It was apparently an epic story of great tumult.

Furthermore, it matched the content of Yuri's spirit vision.

"There are many legends about the great Yuriwaka at Kyushu. Also at Gunma Prefecture, there used to be stories passed down about how Yuriwaka opened up a huge cave in Mount Myougi by shooting an arrow from a great distance. Quite similar to this incident, I'd say."

Ena added, prompting Godou, who was completely unaware of these legends, to express his sincere admiration.

However, Erica and Liliana were contemplating the matter with a subtle expression.

"Wait a minute, is it really correct to consider Yuri's spirit vision within the context of Japanese deities? I've got the name of another candidate hero who matches the current oracle."

"You too, Erica? As I thought, it does resemble that hero greatly, does it not?"

The European knights exchanged glances and Erica suddenly began to recite:

"Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy."[11]

This was probably an excerpt from some story? As Godou wondered, Liliana swiftly followed up.

"His guile and brilliance recognized by the people on earth, his renown even reached the heavens. His name is—"

Godou, Yuri and Ena, the three Japanese, stared with their eyes wide at the sudden performance of harmony as the knights' voices sounded in perfect unison:

" "Odysseus." "

"The Greek leader who devised the Trojan Horse to capture the city of Troy, the king of Ithaca, the indomitable hero. The main protagonist of the *Odyssey* which stands together with the *Iliad* as the two major ancient epic poems of Greek mythology."

Godou had heard of the title that Liliana revealed. Perhaps the book was buried somewhere in the library of the Kusanagi home. Then Erica continued:

"It's virtually identical. Like the Japanese hero who returned home after years of wandering to display his valor through the bow... Odysseus did the same."

"Eh?"

Having already heard numerous stories about how all sorts of myths and legends spread throughout the continents, Godou was convinced this could not be mere coincidence.

Could the current perpetrator be a deity related to both Yuriwaka and the Greek myths—

The two Hime-Miko looked at each other in surprise. In any case, since the spirit vision obtained from the iron arrow did not elucidate the name of the perpetrator, there was no choice but to head to the scene of the crime.

"First of all, let us converge with Amakasu-san..."

Last night, the History Compilation Committee member had revealed the name of the location, Cape Inubou at Choushi City in

the Chiba Prefecture. On the tip of the Bousou Peninsula, it was the easternmost part of the Kantou region. From this location, an arrow was shot magnificently to snipe the top of the Tokyo Tower. .. That was what Amakasu reported.

Using wizardry to investigate, the Committee had narrowed down the position from where the sniping attack was launched. Cape Inubou was a hundred kilometers away from the Tokyo Tower. What kind of divine skill could possibly accomplish such a feat—?

So many troublesome facts, thought Godou with a frown.

Part 4

The usual chauffeur, Amakasu, had already left for the destination first.

Although they could have asked for another driver, Ena had suggested "Wouldn't it be nice to try out convenience store lunchboxes at the train station once in a while?" Furthermore, Erica and Liliana both felt rather interested in her explanation that this type of food on the go was part of the "Japanese traveling experience."

Finally, there was Yuri:

"To think this type of lunchbox existed, I have never heard of it before."

She accepted the idea with an expression of resolve as she spoke . Thus, the means of transport was decided.

Departing Nanao Shrine to reach the Tokyo train station, the group then boarded the express train to Choushi City.

As expected of the homecoming season around New Year's, the trains leaving the Tokyo station were completely packed.

Fortunately, they already had a train compartment reserved in advance.

"So, how should we sit?"

"What you mean is where Godou should sit and who will take the seats beside him... Right?"

"Ena and Erica-san, regardless which of you brought up this topic, do note that you are causing trouble for others."

"But since seats need to be taken anyway, why don't Ena and Yuri just sit next to His Majesty?"

"Oh my, Ena-san. To say the least, I have no intention of relinquishing the position on Godou's right hand side."

"Kusanagi Godou, pardon my intrusion, but would you allow me to arrange the seating?"

Sighing, the silver-haired housekeeper directed the seating arrangements. First of all, Erica, Godou and Ena were seated together while Liliana and Yuri sat opposite to them.

Then the journey began. Lunch consisted of the lunchboxes they had bought earlier at Tokyo Station along the way.

As a side note, the one who suggested the whole idea, Ena, had bought a tangerine gelatin dessert, quite a rare product in recent times. She was now enjoying it with a satisfied smile. Confronted with station lunchboxes for the first time, Yuri had compared them with great seriousness and consideration, finally deciding on *kamameshi* rice with assorted ingredients.[12] She was now eating it blissfully.

Godou had made a suitable choice among the *Makunouchi* style lunchboxes at the station, with Liliana following suit and picking the same.[13]

"As the one in charge of the king's personal affairs, personally verifying what enters the lord's mouth is also part of the job... Also , I think sharing 'the same taste' would be nice."

That was Liliana's explanation.

All serious and business-like to begin with, but subtly shifting in tone halfway through...

Finally, never one to miss out as a food adventurer, Erica was savoring her unusual lunchbox selection of the "Okinawa Product: Seagrape and Bitter Melon Sandwich" with a subtle expression.

After two hours or so, the journey concluded. The five had arrived at the terminus station of Choushi.

This train station was still a short distance from Cape Inubou. A local staff member of the Committee was arranged beforehand to pick them up by car.

Godou and his group made their way from Choushi Station towards the rendezvous point.

Here at this fisherman's harbor and fishing village, distribution was about to stop due to the upcoming New Year's holiday. Hence , those employed in the fishing industry were supposed to be in a leisurely state.

But as expected of the winter break and tourist season, the streets were rather lively.

With many tourists all over, the local specialty stores, fishmongers and places selling and serving seafood were quite busy. The lively atmosphere was wonderful with all the nodding and greeting going on.

"—!?"

Liliana suddenly jumped with surprise as she passed by a fishmonger's store. Various winter catches were displayed at the

storefront, such as chunk-sliced marlin, winter mackerel, winter yellowtail, red bream, etc.

"Eh, I didn't know that Liliana-san had an aversion to fish?"

"Of course not, I eat the vast majority of seafood."

Ena's suspicious question brought forth Liliana's swift answer.

As a country in Southern Europe, Italy was blessed with the Mediterranean's abundant fishing yield which formed a mainstay of Italian cuisine. Being used to seafood was only natural.

But Liliana was timidly looking at the storefront as though she were searching for something. On display was a massive deepwater fish, an anglerfish roughly one meter in length. An old man who seemed to be the shopkeeper was standing beside it, yelling out to peddle his catch as he sliced up the fish to sell in smaller pieces.

It was a dynamic demonstration of the selling style of fishmongers in fishing villages.

"Then what's wrong?"

Liliana was making a troubled expression as if frantically pondering.

"N-Nothing... But just now, the name the shopkeeper called out was probably a certain name. It reminded me of the fish that Amakasu mentioned yesterday that he was going to treat us to..."

"I think it's called the anglerfish hot pot."

After talking to Godou yesterday, Amakasu had extended the same invitation to the knights. From beside Liliana, Erica proceeded to smile and speak:

"You are not mistaken. Indeed, Amakasu-san did ask us yesterday to look forward to that hot pot dish. Hoho, it looks like it will be quite an exciting new experience, Lily."

Erica smiled matter-of-factly like a witch full of malevolence.

"That slippery undulating gelatinous body... Sloppy, sticky, flaccid, an organism with jaws like the entrance to a dungeon. That is the dish we shall savor tonight. Let us prepare ourselves, everyone."

Erica warned as she gazed at the deepwater fish's appearance with a mysteriously solemn expression.

A description that evoked imagery akin to a bastard child born from evil deities manifesting as cosmic horrors. Turning her back to her childhood friend's gaze, Liliana sternly declared:

"W-What are you talking about? Even without prior preparation , this is nowhere near my threshold of fear. No matter what kind of ingredient, you cannot judge how it tastes without trying it once."

Thus Liliana quickened her pace and leaped out in front of the group, walking away rapidly. Chasing after her, Godou and the three other girls whispered among themselves.

"Liliana seems rather helpless against disgusting looking food."

"But due to her serious personality, she will try anything at least once."

"Erica-san, since you already know that, please refrain from pranks of this sort."

"Oh well, but anyway, this is commonplace whenever people try out seafood they've never had before. The person who first discovered *kuchiko* must be a strange one indeed."

"That seems to be the ovary of the sea cucumber..."

After that, they met the Committee member at the crossroads which served as the rendezvous point. Expecting Amakasu, they were surprised to find instead a man they had never met before.

He reported that his acquaintance, the History Compilation Committee member serving directly under the Sayanomiya family (Amakasu, in other words), had spent a hectic night running around to handle various matters. Godou and the girls pitied Amakasu's laborous plight as they got on the car to head towards the destination—Kimigahama.

This was a beautiful beach located quite close to the lighthouse on the easternmost point of Cape Inubou. It was also a park enclosed by a beautiful pine forest.

The place was currently sealed off by members of the History Compilation Committee and the local police. Godou and the four girls were led past the yellow tape to enter the restricted area.

Watching from Kimigahama, the Pacific Ocean in winter seemed quite desolate. The waves were quite tall here and swimming was prohibited even in summer.

Then there was the object in question—a steel crafted bow embedded in a corner of the beach. At five meters long, its dimensions were impossible for human use.

The steel bow was stabbed into the beach like a sword. This Kimigahama beach was the place the History Compilation Committee narrowed down as the sniping spot.

The steel arrow was shot towards the Tokyo Tower from here. Then the Committee members dispatched to this location on emergency investigations had discovered this bow.

"Indeed I can feel a similar divine quality as that arrow..."

Liliana murmured with a pondering expression as if she was sensing something through spirit vision.

"It does not have power on the level of a divine artifact. The divine aura is far too weak to be something a war god used."

"Maybe a bow and arrow wielding divine beast or demigod descended here?"

Liliana's longtime friend and rival, Erica, concurred and offered an explanation. Meanwhile, the other spirit vision user stared at the long and massive bow, then looked in surprise towards the Pacific Ocean in the distance.

"What's the matter, Yuri?"

"Ah yes, I saw it just now, the sacred image of a wandering hero—Wielding something that feels similar to this bow. However, the feeling is not the same."

Yuri answered her fellow Hime-Miko's query in trepidation.

"Something shining with brilliance—I should put it this way. It is just a little bit, but I sensed a divine quality with the attribute of light."

"Could it be light from the east... A deity who possesses a sun god's divinity?"

Erica spoke with a keen gaze. Speaking of which, Yuri was looking out towards the Pacific Ocean in the east.

"On further thought, this incident does have many elements connected to the sun. The Tokyo Tower was sniped at noon with the sun at its peak, whereas this beach is the easternmost location in the Kantou region..."

"Then there is the matter of Yuriwaka and Odysseus."

The blonde knight nodded and agreed with Ena's observation.

A Japanese folk story that greatly resembled the tale of the Greek hero. Godou recalled Erica and Liliana's casual conversation from during the train ride.

'Odysseus, the Achaean military leader who captured the city of Troy.

Suffering the wrath of the god of the oceans, he was stranded on an isolated island. Meanwhile, his subjects back in his territory of Ithaca had run amok, taking over his wealth and property, trying to force Odysseus' wife Penelope to remarry after her husband's presumed death.

Thereafter, Odysseus received divine protection and finally managed to leave the island. After a long and wandering journey, he returned home in the end to slaughter the depraved and violent suitors, recovering his wife and territory—'

Something similar to that. Staring at the five meter bow of steel, Erica mumured:

"Come to think of it, there's Odysseus' bow—the rigid bow that no one could draw apart from Odysseus with his mighty strength. The other warriors tried as best as they could, but none of them could wield it."

Godou's cellphone rang in his pocket at this time. It was a call from Amakasu.

I seem to be getting hungry. Staying at this beach probably won't yield any further progress, so it's probably time to decide our next step with him... Thinking that to himself, Godou reached for his phone.

Godou suddenly felt a sense of revulsion, as if someone was watching him—

Surveying the surroundings, Godou found the girls in his company simply looking around in disbelief while the members of the Committee and the police were positioned quite far away. No one was looking in his direction. Was he imagining things?

Shaking his head, Godou reached for his phone again.

Part 5

Amakasu was waiting at their accommodations while Godou and his group were being taken there.

As soon as they encountered him waiting at the hotel lobby, he began to explain.

This was the seaside of Cape Inubou, the easternmost part of the Kantou region. Nearby, large scale hot springs and entertainment facilities were famous for their view of the ocean.

"Since it's New Year's, let's simply have a stay over. Truth be told, I'm rather attracted by the prospects of the relaxation corner where Thai, Korean, Tunisian and Guam style massages can all be enjoyed."

That was what Amakasu appended at the end.

During the night of the garden party, he was suddenly dispatched here to Cape Inubou and had been busy with investigations and directing information control ever since. Consequently, the special agent looked even less energetic than usual.

Godou immediately answered "No problem" in response to Amakasu's suggestion.

Thus, they decided to check in for now.

From a super large bath facility offering a view of the Pacific, one could see the ocean, dyed red by the setting sun.

It was exactly sunset right now and Amakasu sighed with blissful relaxation.

"It seems to be telling us the stage is already set and waiting for you all."

"What did you say, Amakasu-san?"

Godou was baffled by the mutterings of his fellow hot spring occupant.

Naturally, both of them were completely nude right now.

"I had this feeling that bad things would follow if I didn't get a good soak in the hot springs to relax... But putting that aside. 'Is Yuriwaka Daijin Odysseus?' Ahah, that's Tsubouchi Shouyou."

After listening to Godou recount the girls' daytime conversation , Amakasu mentioned a certain person's name for some reason.

"Tsubouchi... The famous writer who lived during the Meiji period?"

"Yeah, that's him. He was the first person to point out the similarities between the Yuriwaka legend and Odysseus' story. He proceeded to propose 'Homer's epic poetry was spread in Japan during its early modern era and modified, thereby giving rise to the Yuriwaka legend' as a theory."

Steeped in vast knowledge, Amakasu explained leisurely as he immersed himself in the water of the hot spring.

Forced to take off his glasses on such an occasion, Amakasu proved to have unexpectedly clear and slender eyes. Furthermore, readily apparent from his state of nudity was Amakasu's well-trained and muscular body.

Virtually devoid of body fat, his physique reminded one of a boxer's. Looking from this perspective, perhaps he really did have a "master ninja" side to him.

"The academic community back then apparently bought this idea and there were many supporters."

"...Back then?"

Godou listened to Amakasu's subtle statement.

"Yeah, the theory was later rejected after being tested. After all, no one could prove that the *Odyssey* had reached Japan before the early modern era. Well, someone like missionaries could have spread it by boat via China or the Maritime Silk Road but that's just considered wild fancy."

The knowledgeable special agent smiled wryly as he explained.

"Besides, there exist even more logic-defying routes of transmission. Kusanagi-san, you'd probably agree with us, but if you consider the example of Yuri-san, obtaining that sort of information is possible, right..."

Amakasu made a bitter face, prompting Godou to feel unsettled .

"Doesn't that have terrible implications?"

"Bad or terrible regardless, it would not be unbelievable. Let's talk about it in detail during dinner."

"Okay. Then regarding tonight... Can I rely on your help?"

In actual fact, Godou had prearranged to room with Amakasu.

This was his condition for assisting in the incident for Godou had no wish to repeat the same mistake from the London trip. In order to preemptively rule out any chance of rooming with the

girls for no apparent reason, so that he could have a peaceful night during his travels.

Hence, the girls were divided with Erica and Liliana in one room while Ena roomed with Yuri in another.

"Ah yes, well, Kusanagi-san."

Godou cocked his head incredulously in response to Amakasu's vague nodding.

"About this matter, you don't really have to be so uptight by this point, right? Just hurry up, cross the finish line and you'll look all the more manly for it, you know?"

"Oh come on, since you're the only adult here, Amakasu-san, could you please worry a little about these issues!"

The two males took a relaxing break in the spacious bath facility .

Meanwhile at another location—

The resort facility was equipped with an outdoor hot spring that provided an expansive view of the Pacific Ocean, illuminated red by the setting sun. Although the open air and wind were a little chilly, the hot spring's heat prevented the body from feeling cold.

"Phew..."

Soaked in the hot water, Erica exhaled deeply. The four girls were currently gathered here.

"An outdoor bath by the sea turns out to be rather nice."

Erica crossed her beautiful, long and slender legs under the hot water.

She was currently relaxing her body and mind, leisurely enjoying a healing moment.

The waves broke noisily against the walls of the cliff, filling the air with the smell of salty spray. Whether the beautiful sunset or the sea view dyed red—both were scenery one could not normally witness during a bath.

"It's quite warm even for winter and there's a great open feeling to this."

"Last time, we all tried out the Nikkou hot springs at Lake Chuuzenji... But since it was a lake by the mountains, the atmosphere was completely different!"

Ena concurred with Erica's commentary.

Italy and Japan, Southern Europe and the Far East. These two girls were comrades born in countries separated by vast geographic distances.

Nevertheless, they were both equally outstanding in the physical maturity of their figures. Well, perhaps Erica held a slight edge in all respects.

However, that was going strictly by the numbers, a question of what the measurements suggested on first sight.

Based on visual impressions, they were essentially "evenly matched."

Whether in the bulging voluptuous bosoms, slender waists or the round full curves of their hips, Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena had met their match in each other's prodigious natural gifts.

"The Nikkou hot springs... Really was quite disastrous."

Immersed in the hot spring, Yuri's face went red. Rather than caused by the water temperature, it seemed more likely the result of her recalled memories.

"Th-That sort of behavior was really too inappropriate back then. Completely beyond the bounds of decency. Whether Ena-san or Erica-san, please do not engage in such bizarre competitiveness again..."

Yuri's sense of embarrassment made her realize.

Compared to those two girls, her own figure gave off less of an impression of volume.

Be that as it may, it was not an image of paucity. Rather, it was the opposite. Whether in her bust or hip measurements, Yuri's physical development was in full bloom. As a female, her body was flawless in its curvaceous and supple figure.

Despite her voluptuous body, Yuri's figure gave others a delicate impression at the same time.

From a female perspective, Erica and Ena's bodies were more seductive in the sense of volume whereas the undulating curves of Yuri's slender figure probably left others with a stronger impression.

"Well, rather than asking those two to practice self-restraint..."

Liliana lamented with great feeling. Her pale white skin, corresponding to her Eastern European heritage, was flushed red by the hot spring's high temperature.

"It would be far more constructive for us to keep our eyes wide open to prevent the same mistakes from recurring, Mariya Yuri."

Among the four girls present, Liliana was the slimmest of them all.

On the other hand, she possessed a fairy-like charm instead. Rather than womanly, it would be better described as a delicate and slender figure of "adolescence." Crystal clear and flawless, her pale white skin was like a doll's.

An unripened taste of dream-like attraction.

Nevertheless, she was completely unaware of her own charm. Moreover, this seductive quality of hers was increasing without her conscious intent—

In any case, the four girls each had their respective advantages.

Enjoying the winter hot springs by the sea, this year they were rejuvenating their exhausted bodies while accompanying the man who always insisted on membership in the common sense faction despite being prone to perpetrating terrible atrocities.

Suddenly, Ena spoke up.

"By the way, Yuri, if possible... Even if it's just tonight, let's sleep together with His Majesty, the two of us—wanna try *that*?"

"That? What are you referring to?"

Yuri cocked her head in puzzlement in response to the vagueness of the key point.

"Yeah, *that*. Bring your ear closer and I'll tell you."

"Oh okay—Eh!?"

Ena's discreet whispers caused Yuri's expression to freeze.

"A-An affair!?"

"Yes, that's right. Something like that. As I mentioned before, His Majesty refused last time."

"Oh you mean that, when Mariya Yuri and I were turned into stone, what you forced Kusanagi Godou to do..."

Liliana made a suffering expression while Erica frowned.

"...Ena-san."

Erica spoke elegantly in her usual tone of voice but with a subtle difference.

Standing in stark contrast against Erica, Liliana was, of course, the first and foremost opponent as part of the red-blue pair. But recently, it felt as if the approaches of the new formidable rival of Seishuuin Ena threatened Erica's brilliance on occasion.

She was another formidable opponent as Erica's foil with different characteristics from Liliana. Ena was the type of person whose words managed to occasionally disrupt Erica's inner composure.

"But afterwards, I thought over it."

On the other hand, Ena did not notice the subtle changes in her competitor's inner thoughts and continued ruefully:

"Indeed Ena was refused back then... But I said I'd continue to wait. Waiting for His Majesty."

Erica understood the attitudes towards love presented by Ena's heartfelt words.

"If an opportunity comes along for even more heightened emotions, and Ena and Yuri were to seize it deftly, perhaps success might occur with unexpected ease."

" " "..." " "

Listening to Ena, the other three girls pondered silently.

"Indeed, because he is Kusanagi Godou."

"Yes, Godou-san is that kind of person."

"After all, he is the type who casts his prior words to the wind when caught up in the moment, only acting in accordance with his roused spirits... The scenario is quite probable."

"Well, so long as he is not together with unknown women, it will be fine."

"Agreed... Clearly he is not someone without self-control, yet he is completely unstoppable when engaging in shocking behavior..."

"It's true, His Majesty is really a strange person. But this aspect is what makes things fun."

Reaching consensus, the four girls nodded together.

Also, meanwhile over in the male hot spring, Kusanagi Godou was sneezing in a classic textbook manner, completely unaware of this conversation—

Then the scene shifted once more.

To Kimigahama, dyed a shade of red by the burning sunset.

Standing embedded in the beach, the iron bow underwent a subtle change. The massive steel bow's string was shining and giving off light.

This unnoticeable level of brightness was easily overwhelmed by the light of the setting sun.

Consequently, none of the personnel of the History Compilation Committee, the police or the fire department noticed. Furthermore, a dramatic change was also underway somewhere far from dry land.

The Kuroshio Current flowed along the western edge of the Pacific towards the islands of Japan.

Riding along this ocean current, a massive object the size of a coral reef was moving north from Okinawa.

Northwards, northwards, it sought its unseen target.

Naturally, this was happening unbeknownst to Kusanagi Godou's group at this point in time.

Chapter 3 - Bow, Arrow, Divine Beasts' Arrival

Part 1

After a good soak in the hot springs, Godou and everyone else returned to the hotel.

Dinner commenced an hour later. As meals were allowed to be brought up to the rooms, everyone had gathered in the room for the men—Godou and Amakasu's room.

Due to the Japanese style of the hotel, all members of the group had changed into yukatas provided by the accommodations.

The long table was laden with various dinner dishes, with seafood comprising the majority as expected.

Assorted sashimi, salt roasted mackerel, boiled red bream—the various fish dishes brought a myriad of vivid colors to the dining table. On the side was a bucket filled with cooked rice, ready to be served.

However, the main dish occupying the most table space was something else.

An earthenware pot was bubbling and simmering on a gas stove. This was the anglerfish hot pot that Amakasu had booked in advance. The fish market at the town of Ooarai in the Ibaraki Prefecture was quite famous as the place of origin for this type of fish. Anglerfish could also be caught at Choushi City, apparently.

"Speaking of winter hot pots, the most common ones use pufferfish or cod, I like those too."

Amakasu commented.

"It's almost ready."

Observing that the boiling pot was almost ready, Yuri lifted the lid, thus releasing a very fragrant aroma.

A great deal of steam drifted up, carrying with it the appetizing flavor of miso. The Japanese trio of Yuri, Ena and Godou naturally began to smile.

Indeed, gathering everyone together for a hot pot meal was a unique pleasure.

On the other hand, the foreign duo were displaying vastly different expressions. Liliana seemed to be racking her brain as though she was facing a trial of a lifetime.

As for Erica, despite maintaining her usual noble airs like a lady , her overflowing anticipation could not be suppressed. Her eyes were glimmering brightly.

"Ever since I saw the real thing this morning, my curiosity was piqued greatly, so this can't be helped. What sort of astounding taste might come from a fish with that kind of appearance, how could I possibly not confirm it..." She seemed to be murmuring randomly.

Erica was very particular about her food, always making all sorts of demands in her everyday diet. But with regards to non-everyday food, Erica was a girl who placed greater emphasis on impressions than taste.

But was this "famous specialty" really going to meet the Diavolo Rosso's expectations in this regard?

Godou had his doubts but he refrained from voicing them.

After all, things would become all clear as soon as she tasted the food. On the other hand, he turned his gaze towards Liliana. Normally taking charge of adding the ingredients sequentially to the hot pot during times like these, she was currently staring at the pot instead.

"There is other food here, so you do not have to force yourself..."

Yuri tried to lighten the mood. Liliana answered in a stern voice .

"N-No. Avoiding food without even tasting it once is unfitting behavior for a knight. Mariya Yuri, please be sure to serve me a proper portion."

Asking Yuri to serve her instead of doing it herself, Liliana was a bit of a sore loser.

But she resolutely accepted the food served by the industrious Hime-Miko. Watching the gelatinous substance quivering in her bowl with an expression of great determination, she finally took her chopsticks and brought the morsel to her mouth—

"H-Hey, the taste is not bad after all."

Liliana remarked with relief and began to chew and eat as usual .

"By the way, although the liver is very popular, Ena prefers the cheeks. On such occasions, a cup of a certain boiling hot beverage would really hit the spot."

"Let me be clear, Seishuuin. Amakasu-san is the only one allowed to say *sake* would be nice in this kind of situation..."

In response to Ena's bold admission to underage drinking, Godou preemptively blocked the notion.

Before these two, Yuri was ladling the pot's contents into their bowls. Taking the so-called seven organs—the liver, the meat, the stomach, the skin, the ovaries, the gills and the fins, her earnest efforts at equitable distribution for everyone stood in testament to her care and concern. Simply watching was enough to feel it.

This was a natural gesture of considerate care, very true to Yuri's style.

Meanwhile, Amakasu was eating the gelatinous substance at his own pace. Judging from the emptied state of his beer bottle, he probably had no intention of working tonight.

Finally, there was one more person.

With a complicated expression, Erica was savoring the delicious cuisine made from Choushi City's deep sea catch.

"The taste is quite agreeable, but it's a little different from what I expected."

A mediocre rating given to delicious cuisine, it resembled a food critic's statement to a certain extent.

Then the dinner continued. Having renewed her vigor midway through, Liliana put down her bowl and chopsticks to help Yuri replenish the pot's assorted ingredients. Then she served everyone to savor—

When dinner was just about finished, Godou raised an issue.

"By the way, Amakasu, about our conversation just now."

"Ah yes, various matters about Yuriwaka and Odysseus."

The special agent, drinking *sake* brewed locally in the Chiba Prefecture, muttered as he poured himself a full cup. His voice and mannerisms remained the same as usual even while he was drinking.

"Ultimately, stories similar to Odysseus' tale of adventure do exist on the continent."

Also just as usual, he was speaking in a knowledgeable tone of voice.

Clearly a bottle of beer and two bottles of Japanese *sake* were not enough to make him drunk.

"I already know that in various places in Europe, there exist stories similar to the epic poem about Odysseus... But the same goes for Asia too?"

Erica inquired. Amakasu chuckled "Hoho" as he responded.

"There's Japan's Yuriwaka Daijin, China's Xue Pinggui[14], as well as a prince who went through something similar in a Buddhist story. Then there's Korea, Southeast Asia and India which all have similar heroes."

Amakasu slowly poured *sake* into his cup as he made a statement on a grand scale.

"Odysseus—His prototype must have been a heroic story that spread throughout the continent via tribal migration and cultural interchange. A Pan-Eurasian myth, one could say."

Erica frowned at this explanation.

"In other words, a hero who straddles the continent, both oriental and occidental."

"This is one of the characteristics of the 'King of the End' as mentioned by His Highness the Black Prince. Hoho, I was reminded of it during Yuri-san's oracle. Perhaps it really could be him."

So the Devil King-exterminating hero was finally returning?

Although Amakasu had raised an unsettling possibility, he immediately shrugged and smiled wryly.

"That said, this is merely speculation no matter what. It is highly likely that our fears are actually unfounded. At this

juncture, worrying over everything won't be of much help. Simply based on the epic poem, Odysseus doesn't really have the characteristics of [Steel]."

"Indeed, now is still too early a stage to be discussing the 'King of the End'..."

Liliana grumbled with her arms crossed.

"Yeah, so in any case, we'll take things easy tonight then start investigating seriously tomorrow."

"Well, Amakasu-san, although this might be a little sudden, may I discuss something with you?"

Erica smiled suspiciously.

"For example, perhaps you could be so kind as to disappear from your room tonight or something like that?"

This exchange caused Godou's heart to skip a beat while Amakasu muttered "Hoh."

"In other words, something like room arrangements favorable to couples during school excursions."

"It's wonderful how well you understand."

"But this time, Kusanagi-san explicitly requested me to room with him. This was demanded directly by the peerless Devil King himself. Opposing it would take substantial boldness of heart."

"Then would you consider a return gift in accordance with Japanese tradition, I remember it's called the year-end present?"

"Oh my, it really is."

"If you wish, I'll treat you to a week's vacation in Europe, how about that?"

"I just happened to have accumulated enough paid vacation days."

Amakasu and Erica were akin to a pair of sly foxes, one old and one female.

Just as their conversation was reaching a high point, another person interjected.

"Ah, what about this? Amakasu-san, do you prefer the mountains or the sea? If that's the case, Ena can provide you whichever one you choose. I also saw many year-end presents delivered back home."

"Oh I see, goods from the Seishuuin home. One would really look forward to them."

With even Ena was joining in, Godou decided the situation was moving in a terrible direction...

Right when Godou was about to frantically interrupt, Liliana issued a warning before he could do so.

"Amakasu Touma, please do not get ahead of yourself. Considering these two people here, they are not really offering you benefits in earnest."

"No, but the task is welcome in its own right."

Amakasu smiled wryly as he turned his gaze to the girl who had not spoken.

"If we don't stop soon, Yuri-san is going to scold us... Eh, what's the matter, Yuri-san?"

Taking a closer look and finding Yuri staring out the window mesmerized, Godou called out:

"Mariya?"

"...Ah, my apologies, what were you saying?"

Suddenly brought back to her senses, Yuri apologized. Then Ena inquired:

"Did you actually see something?"

"Y-Yes. Just now, I felt an ominous presence from the sea."

Godou also turned to look at the window. Due to the heating in the room and the hot pot, the temperature difference between indoors and outside had covered the window glass with dripping condensation.

Like the hot spring spa earlier, this hotel also faced the ocean.

A view of the Pacific from each room was apparently a selling point. The ocean was outside right next to the window.

"Ominous... What did you see in particular?"

"Good question... Just a feeling that something exceedingly dangerous was approaching by riding the ocean current from the south—"

As Amakasu confirmed the situation with an increasingly serious expression, Yuri answered without confidence.

But Godou could feel his body tense up. Of all the people present, no one would dismiss Yuri's "just a feeling" as inconsequential.

Part 2

"Just in case, I'd better return to the scene..."

In response to Yuri's coincidental oracle, Amakasu muttered in contemplation.

"That way, I can get a hold of the latest news faster. Well then, Kusanagi-san, since I believe I might return very late, please feel free to go to bed first without waiting for me."

Godou went "Eh?" in surprise at the sudden news.

"V-Very late? How late is that?"

"Well, it could very well last until morning. Worse comes to worst, I'll just have to take a nap directly at the scene."

This meant that Godou's male roommate plan was wrecked. Erica began smiling elegantly in response to Amakasu's words.

Feigning ignorance, the special agent smiled at Godou as if cheering him on.

"You're over thinking things. Compared to thinking, making babies is much easier."

"W-What's that supposed to mean?"

"Perhaps an opportunity might arise for babies to be conceived tonight, four of them all at once—In any case, we of the Committee pledge our full support in helping raise the children, so don't worry about needing to hold back."

"What nonsense are you spouting? Of course I'm coming with you!"

Hence, an hour later—

Having changed their clothes, Godou and his entourage returned to the beach of Kimigahama.

This time, Amakasu accompanied them as well. As a side note, because the only person with a driving license had been drinking, the Committee sent someone else to pick them up.

The time was after 9pm so night was well underway.

Entering the sealed off coastal area, Amakasu immediately headed off to the location of his colleagues and Committee staff. Meanwhile, Yuri murmured "Ah—" as she stood beside Godou.

"The feeling is stronger compared to during the daytime... Yes, unmistakably so."

Asserting thus, the Hime-Miko broke into a run.

Godou glanced at his companions and started chasing after her along with Erica, Ena and Liliana. Yuri was heading towards the place where the steel bow was embedded.

—The metal bow of steel standing upright on the beach.

As the four caught up, Yuri was already out of breath and staring seriously at the steel bow.

"The divine presence has strengthened...?"

The instant Liliana whispered softly, Godou experienced a repulsive feeling. Someone was watching?

Come to think it, the same feeling happened this morning too.

He could feel with greater certainty that someone was staring at him—rather, it was definitely an "enemy" existence. Owing to a Campione's sense of danger, keen as a wild beast's, Godou discovered something in the long and massive bow of steel. Unmistakably, "something existed" inside the bow.

"Carrying this bow is the hero who shoulders a fate of wandering..."

Yuri suddenly murmured, for she too had seen the "enemy."

"Firing an arrow from the bow in a show of his mighty arm strength and valor to the people—Godou-san!"

Immediately, a humanoid shadow suddenly appeared behind the bow.

Lacking a well-defined outline, a vague blue figure—Standing roughly five meters tall, it rivaled the steel bow in size and was clearly no ordinary person.

Yet Godou's body and mind did not switch to a Campione's combat ready state. Even if this was the user of the divine bow and arrows, it was clearly not a [Heretic God].

Using a body part resembling the left hand, the figure grabbed the steel bow in a simple manner.

Then an arrow appeared in the right hand, two meters or so in length. Like the one discovered at the Tokyo Tower, it was a long and massive steel arrow resembling a spear.

The figure slowly positioned the steel arrow on the bow, drawing it and aiming towards Kusanagi Godou.

The distance was less than ten meters. For an archer capable of sniping from a hundred kilometers away, this arrow was clearly not going to miss its mark.

Erica and Liliana sprang into action instantly.

"Yuri, stand back please!"

"Kusanagi Godou, you be careful too."

Erica summoned the magic sword of the lion as she directed Yuri. Liliana also called forth Il Maestro.

Nodding at her voice, Godou began to run.

Fiercely, towards the mysterious figure, Godou moved as if ignoring the warning. But this would do well enough.

In actual fact, Godou alone could handle the situation with the [Raptor] even if shot at—

The figure finally drew the bowstring to its limit. The arrowhead, resembling a spear's tip, was aimed at Godou's forehead.

"Ama no Murakumo, I entrust His Majesty's safety to you!"

At this moment, Ena called out from behind.

Immediately, the divine sword Ama no Murakumo from Godou's right arm suddenly manifested, presumably taking emergency action in response to Ena's call.

At the same time, the figure released the arrow from its fingers.

Woosh, the arrow of steel flew at Godou, but he—or rather, Ama no Murakumo in his right hand moved by itself and chopped it down.

A sharp metallic clang rang out. This act of defense was not a move Godou could originally perform, being completely unversed in swordsmanship.

But of course, it was a different matter with Ena controlling Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi from a distance.

Saved through his comrade's assistance, Godou relaxed his right arm and went "I'll leave things in your hands" to inform Ama no Murakumo his intention to attack.

Hence, the "partner" flew out from Godou's hand, hurtling towards the bow-wielding figure.

An eye for an eye. The divine sword counterattacked in vengeance for the "arrow." The battle was decided with unexpected ease. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's tip pierced the figure's chest quite splendidly.

The sword's attack caused the figure with the poorly defined outline to vanish.

As the figure dissipated like mist bathed beneath the morning sunlight, a metallic clang was heard. Due to the wielder's disappearance, the giant steel bow fell down on the sand of the beach.

"What the heck, that's..."

Watching the steel bow fall down so simply, Godou muttered.

In terms of strength, the feeling was similar to that from a divine beast. However, the enemy was rather fragile... Godou turned to face Yuri.

"The one just now was not a deity. I think it is a a god's shadow—an existence of that sort. A portion of some great divinity , manifesting on earth..."

Perhaps this was the reason why spirit vision was unable to discern the deity's identity, Yuri concluded.

"When something incomprehensible happened so suddenly, how should we seek to understand it?"

Just as Erica was murmuring with a frown—

Amakasu approached, a cellphone in his hand.

"As expected, once a Campione gets involved personally, things progress immediately... I'm glad that everyone is okay. Although I just received some terrifying news—"

Apparently, he had noticed and quietly observed the scene just now.

"In fact, right now a massive unknown life form is traveling north towards the Pacific along Honshu Island."

"...Huh?"

Godou suddenly heard an unexpected report.

"Due to Yuri-san's information, we checked it out just in case. The coast guard is apparently in turmoil over the situation that resembles a giant monster movie... After our staff went to investigate, 'does not seem to be a divine beast' was the report."

"....."

"It will arrive offshore of Choushi very soon. As expected, the destination really was this place."

"P-Please do not say 'as expected' during times like these."

Despite harboring the same suspicions himself, Godou still voiced his objections.

Then he felt his back shake violently as power for combat surged through his body, filling his heart with fighting spirit. As a Campione's mortal enemy, a [Heretic God] has appeared!

Godou surveyed the surroundings and discovered it.

When clearly the winter night sky had been cloudless all along, dark clouds had appeared before they knew it. The pitch black clouds rumbled, announcing the coming of thunder.

Then in the sea—an alarming sight had appeared!

A silhouette of a "woman."

A woman's shadow, graceful and seemingly clothed. Hair of considerable length. Standing so tall that her head rose above the clouds, it was quite a gigantic silhouette.

'I have found you, my new lord hero..."

A woman's whispers came from the sky.

Although it was a beautiful and lovely voice, Godou remained vigilant. What was the enemy's goal!?

'Ufufufu, please do not be so tense. Tonight is the night that commemorates our first encounter.'

Once again, whispers were heard from the sky, carrying laughter.

The voice gave a noble impression as if belonging to a princess who nurtured flowers and butterflies in a palace. The beautiful voice alone was already worthy of a goddess' elegance.

"What purpose brings you here specifically, great goddess? Let me make myself clear first, I have no intention of fighting you."

Godou refused on the outset.

The majority of gods and god-slayers were hostile to one another. As a pacifist, Godou had no wish of playing a willing part in their desires to make situations deteriorate.

On the other hand, the goddess resembling a princess spoke with full composure.

'My, you really do not act like a god-slayer. Fufu, it is because I am convinced that I shall undoubtedly find a famous hero. For truly the ways of fate are mysterious!"

"...I can't believe you said 'find'?"

'Ah yes, these islands have pleased me for some time now, for all sorts of conflicts have arose in a span of mere months. The heroic presence is raging and running amok.'

These islands. She was probably referring to the islands of Japan.

As for all sorts of conflicts—was she referring to the series of battles against Athena, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Lancelot? Realizing one of the reasons why this goddess had come, Godou calmed down slightly.

Come to think of it, given her current explanation, could she be a goddess who has traveled to Japan from overseas...?

'I sent the "divine spirit of the bow" over for a little test. As expected, I finally found a hero it approved. This is most pleasing.'

The princess-like goddess declared and pleaded further.

'Lord Hero, please accept my feelings. We have a great deal to talk about, but let us save that for another time!'

Instantly, the goddess' silhouette disappeared without warning.

In addition, the steel bow fallen on the beach vanished as well. But the clouds in the sky remained.

Godou's combat state persisted, standing as evidence that the goddess was still nearby.

"Amakasu, please leave us here and ask the others to conduct an emergency evacuation. A [Heretic God] and divine beasts will soon descend upon this place!"

The one who issued direct orders was naturally Erica.

She apparently understood what the goddess meant by " feelings." Godou felt the same way. It was hard to imagine other possibilities given the situation.

Amakasu went "I pray for victorious fortune to smile upon you all" and immediately took off.

Very quickly, Godou and his companions were the only ones remaining in the vicinity of Kimigahama beach.

This was now a wide open battlefield where one did not have to worry about innocent victims. Having obtained ideal conditions, Godou turned his gaze towards his comrades.

Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena. Everyone immediately understood.

The five would find an "enemy" appearing out of the Pacific Ocean soon. As expected of Kimigahama beach where swimming was prohibited, the waves were truly ferocious.

"Something really is approaching land, resembling a coral reef...?"

"Ena thinks it's an extra large turtle shell with the limbs retracted?"

Liliana and Ena gazed at the horizon and commented with their excellent vision.

It looked like the enemy's appearance could not be confirmed. Given Godou's eyes, he could not even determine the location.

"In any case, it's surely a divine beast."

Ena asserted. She had already drawn her partner, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Liliana was caped in her black and blue striped bandiera. Erica was also armed with the magic sword Cuore di Leone and clad in her red and black cape.

However, as the one with the sharpest spiritual senses here, Yuri issued a warning.

"Everyone, up there! Please look at the sky!"

Godou was shocked to turn his gaze towards the sky.

A crescent moon's light was shining from the dark clouds which had appeared together with the goddess earlier.

The gliding shadow of a gigantic bird then blocked the light. With a wingspan of fifteen meters or so, its size and appearance resembled a Steller's sea eagle.[15]

A sacred giant bird serving a goddess—a divine beast in the form of a divine eagle had appeared.

SQAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

The divine eagle's cries resounded through the night sky.

At the same time, the unknown life form from the ocean was also arriving at Kimigahama beach rather quickly. Godou was finally able to discern its shape with the naked eye.

Indeed, it did resemble a coral reef or a turtle's shell.

But instead, it was actually a "great serpent in a coil." Spinning like a top as it glided on the ocean surface, it rushed forth.

"I don't think a snake can actually do that kind of thing..."

"Only befitting of a minion serving divinity..."

The two Hime-Miko murmured. In contrast to Ena's grumbles, Yuri's sincere admiration was quite in line with her high-born lady's style.

Uncoiling itself, the great serpent would soon make a landing.

HIIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSSSS!

The fifty-meter sea serpent roared.

Spinning like a top as it glided over the sea, it rushed at the beach on Cape Inubou, looking as though it was just about to bite the seashore.

The divine eagle in the sky and the great sea serpent in the ocean—

As well as the [Heretic God] located somewhere else. In a rather unfitting manner to conclude the year-end, an intense battle commenced.

Part 3

A single divine beast was already challenging enough to handle , but not only did two appear, one was even flying freely in the sky . This left no opening for a direct frontal assault. Godou immediately called out:

"I'll deal with the one in the sea. You girls try your best to restrain the flying one!"

Erica, Ena and Liliana nodded respectively in acknowledgement and scattered.

Motioning to Yuri with his eyes to ask her to retreat, Godou quietly chanted spell words.

"So says Lord Mithra. The sinful shall be met with justice."

Enveloped in flames, a black shadow suddenly manifested before his eyes.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Responding to Godou's chanting of spell words, the flames and shadows transformed into a twenty-meter long divine beast.

Verethragna's fifth incarnation, the [Boar], had manifested. This time, the targets for destruction were the sea serpent and the divine eagle. Might as well use a monster's strength to crush monsters.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!

The air rumbled from the familiar roar. With pitch black fur covering a monstrous and gigantic body, the boar kicked the ground with its short, stout legs, glaring towards the sea as it reared up vigorously on its hind legs.

Its gaze was directed towards the great sea serpent rushing at the Cape Inubou shore.

Instantly, the sea serpent shot out forcefully from the sea like an arrow, its jaws and fangs clashing violently with the [Boar]'s snout.

HIIIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!!

The sea serpent howled in pain. In a frontal clash with the [Boar]'s snout, the sea serpent was the only side receiving damage.

Verethragna's pitch black sacred beast remained virtually motionless. Taking a human fight as an analogy, this was like one person taking hits while the one throwing the punches reeled back in pain.

Then the [Boar] dug its long, sharp tusks into the sea serpent's body, ripping its scales apart.

The sea serpent twisted its long and winding body to slither on the beach, trying to escape from the pitch black slaughterer. However, the [Boar] used its front legs to step violently on the snake's slender body, pinning it down.

This motion was unexpectedly agile in spite of the [Boar]'s brawny appearance. Then the [Boar] thrust its tusks forward again.

HIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSS!!

The sea serpent howled again, writhing and shaking its massive body violently. Indeed, a fundamental difference existed between a Campione's authority and the likes of a divine beast.

Since the serpent side seemed to be well-handled, Godou turned his gaze towards his friends and the divine eagle. The divine eagle was currently circling the Kimigahama sky slowly.

The supernatural bird of prey gazed at the ground down below as it flew.

Immediately, Godou felt a terrifying chill down his spine. Intense killing intent was directed towards him presently. Using its keen avian eyes, the divine eagle had targeted the Campione below as its prey.

"Tsk, possessing night vision even though it's a diurnal bird."

Just as Godou made a verbal jab at the enemy's unnatural ability, the divine eagle swooped down rapidly.

Of course, it was heading straight for Kusanagi Godou. However, Godou did not try to evade. Since it was too late anyway , he will depend on support—!

"People, listen to David's song of mourning! How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"[16]

Just as he had hoped, the incantation of a trump card could be heard.

"O bow of Jonathan, the warrior's weapon fast as an eagle and strong as a lion. Descend into my hand now!"

Having scattered previously, Liliana now summoned the bow of Jonathan to fire an arrow of blue light, capable of piercing even gods. It was a projectile that once struck the hero Perseus right on target. Using this weapon, Liliana sniped at the divine eagle that was swooping rapidly down on Godou.

The arrow of blue light flew straight towards the swiftly descending bird of prey.

Combined with Liliana's archery, the bow of Jonathan delivered a fatal arrow to the divine eagle's neck with perfect accuracy and speed like the wind—That was what was supposed to happen.

Instead, just before the arrow struck, the divine eagle quickly ascended, evading the deadly arrow at the very last moment.

This was probably deserving of praise. The divine eagle was exceptionally skilled in flying. Watching the bird trace out a U-shaped trail in the sky through its rapid ascent, Godou clicked his tongue.

From a Campione's perspective, divine beasts originating as the servants of the gods were indeed weak foes.

But for Liliana and the girls, divine beasts were formidable enemies requiring going all-out to secure a narrow victory. Ordinary methods were not going to work, naturally. And this time, the enemy possessed the ability to fly freely in the sky.

Such an opponent could not be expected to fall so easily to an attack of this level. Seeing things unfold as expected, Ena cried out.

"O divine wind, go forth and exorcise, blow forth and rage!"

These were spell words chanted to manipulate wind. Furthermore, even a god's power had been added on top.

Haya Susanoo no Mikoto was the "grampsy" who protected Ena . Calling upon this storm god's divine spirit, the Hime-Miko of the Sword used an imitation of a wind god's power.

First she struck the flying divine eagle horizontally with a swift gust of sudden wind from the side.

As expected of a bird of prey that glided upon the wind, this was not enough. Ena proceeded to create a vortex of wind in the air to swallow up the divine eagle.

Devoured by the swirling vortex, the divine bird of prey, which resembled a Steller's Sea Eagle, kept twisting its gigantic body. However.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

The divine eagle cawed sharply. From its body, immense magical power was released and spread out as tempestuous wind, neutralizing Ena's vortex. This divine eagle also possessed sacred powers ruling over the wind.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

It cawed again. The tempest increased in strength from the divine eagle's power, causing the sky to rage turbulently.

As though a typhoon was landing on the shore, the sea also became turbulent all of a sudden. Was the girl who stood as Susanoo's cherished Hime-Miko no match for the divine eagle in a contest of wind—?

Even so, Ena still put forth all her strength, intending to control the wind and the atmosphere.

However, just as she was about to reach her limit, it went without saying that the one who took action was naturally the blonde knight of red.

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me? "

Chanting the "Golgotha spell words" that expressed despair towards God through a Psalm, Erica invoked one of her trump cards.

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."[17]

Cuore di Leone was entrusted with power capable of tearing a god apart.

Its form was that of a slender longsword. Wielded in Erica's hand, this sword transformed into a javelin for throwing. The owner had applied transformation magic upon it. The javelin's shaft was roughly one meter long.

Erica swiftly took this javelin and handed it over to the person beside her.

The one who received the javelin was Liliana, wielding the blue bow of Jonathan.

Using Cuore di Leone in its javelin form as an arrow, she placed it upon the glowing blue bowstring using her right hand and fired at the divine eagle.

A shooting attack performed using the bow of Jonathan together with the Golgotha spell words added on top—

The arrow streaked across the night sky like a comet, finally striking the divine eagle's broad left wing.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

The divine eagle cried out with excruciating pain.

With one wing shot and injured, the divine eagle went "Gah" as its balance was disrupted greatly. However, it managed to barely pull through. Once again it gave off an acute caw.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

As if controlling the wind, a sudden updraft rose from below to support the divine eagle's massive body.

The supernatural bird of prey began to increase its speed patiently. Even Erica and Liliana's combination skill was unable to disable its wings.

"Once it escapes high up into the air, it'll be difficult for us to launch an effective follow up attack..."

Erica furrowed her brow. Even someone like her would probably find it difficult to maintain her elegance at this time.

After all, it was a battle against a divine beast. Due to the enemy's advantage of wings, even the numerical superiority of three against one was not enough to guarantee victory. Godou turned his gaze sharply towards the great sea serpent.

Currently, the sea serpent was battling the [Boar] on the shore.

Verethragna's fifth incarnation was ramming with its tusks, occasionally slamming with its body, trampling fiercely with its four stout legs, ravaging its opponent violently.

Godou decided he had better hurry and finish up so that he could assist Erica and the girls. Was that possible!?

—However, Godou's fighting spirit suddenly ran into a snag.

The goddess' silhouette appeared over the Pacific again. She could be seen making what appeared to be hand waving motions. Next, sparks flew down from the sky, landing on the sea serpent's body.

Immediately, the great sea serpent glowed with white brilliance and suddenly coiled up its body.

Crash! Moving like a whip, the serpentine body sent the [Boar] flying far away with a fierce whipping attack.

Apparently, the serpent had powered up from the energy conferred by the goddess. Furthermore, it followed up with an unexpected attack. The sea serpent suddenly extended its body.

Numerous scales covered the snake's body. Until just now, its body length was roughly fifty meters or so, but suddenly it stretched like rubber, lengthening several fold.

The sea serpent's body became even more supple and increased in elasticity.

Moreover, the great snake was indeed like a rope made of rubber, using its extraordinarily long body to entangle the [Boar]'s gigantic body.

Literally, the boar's head, stout torso, limbs, everything was restrained.

And this serpentine rubbery mass was even capable of releasing electric shocks.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAA
!!

This time, it was the [Boar]'s turn to howl in pain. Desperately, it shook its body, trying to peel off the sea serpent ensnaring it. But it was useless. It did not even succeed in loosening the serpent's grip.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAR!!

The [Boar] howled again. This time it was a cry of anger.

But the sea serpent's rubbery body remained tightly coiled around it. In response, the serpent released an electric shock again. The [Boar] rolled about painfully, looking completely helpless.

"I didn't think there existed something it couldn't destroy..."

'Fufufufu. Rather well fought, Lord God-slayer!"

As Godou listened in surprise, the goddess' voice was coming from overhead.

She was still talking like a confident princess. At the same time as its mistress' appearance, the divine eagle in the sky also flew towards the sea. The goddess' silhouette that manifested began to glide on the sea, but it did not seem like she was intending to defeat Godou's group all at once.

'Truly awe-inspiring in your stand against the Fire Goddess and her servants. As expected, you do possess talent worthy of my attention!'

Her lovely voice sounded like a child's. Godou stared at the goddess' silhouette.

It was a giant figure appearing in the night sky over the Pacific.

Located at the easternmost point of the Kantou region, Cape Inubou was quite a popular place for watching the first sunrise every New Year's. But currently, the goddess' shadow was dominating the view instead of the sun.

Nevertheless, this was obviously not her original size...

"What is your name?"

'It cannot be disclosed at this juncture. The Fire Goddess, yes. Fufu, please consider that my name for now.'

Godou's question only elicited a jestful answer.

Clearly the goddess did not plan on revealing either name or her true appearance, despite the fact that out of all the gods Godou encountered so far, the majority of them possessed extreme egos and loved making grand appearances—

As he frowned, Godou's companions gathered by his side.

Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena. Nodding to them all, Godou motioned to Yuri with his eyes. The Hime-Miko mournfully shook her head in response.

Yuri was apparently unable to discern the identity of this "Fire Goddess." It could not be helped.

This meant the [Sword] could not be used to tear apart this divinity!

'After so long, I finally find another hero god-slayer. This must be guided by the stars... Fufu, I feel the hand of destiny in our encounter. O hero, please indulge me with your exalted name.'

"Just call me insect. I don't want to tell my name to someone who won't even introduce hers."

Godou felt slightly annoyed by this strange noble lady's use of " destiny" as a description.

It sounded like something a lovestruck adolescent girl might say. Feeling like this would be troublesome to deal with, Godou refused.

'Well, what an unsympathetic gentleman you are. But no matter . If I wanted to, I could instantly find out for myself. —Right, you are Kusanagi Godou-sama.'

What!? Godou was shocked. He never expected his name to be read so easily!

'Fufu. All objects and living things existing between heaven and earth... Knowing all their names is a woman's accomplishment. Please do not underestimate me!'

"I-Is that how it works?"

"Are you an idiot, Godou? Accomplishing something ridiculous like that takes a goddess, not a woman!"

"Hmm. We witches and miko also have the power of spirit vision. She must possess eyes with far greater powers than that!"

Erica and Liliana explained independently in response to Godou's shock.

How ridiculous. As Godou recovered from his surprise, Yuri declared solemnly:

"This goddess is a deity of magic... A goddess possessing myriad transformations, making use of a variety of spells to produce all sorts of miracles and mysterious phenomena. Please be careful, for this goddess bears similarities to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven in this regard!"

Come to think of it, that monkey had also skillfully employed all sorts of spells in a flexible manner.

Godou turned his gaze up towards the goddess' silhouette again. Compared to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven who was also a member of [Steel], she was vastly inferior in martial prowess. Even so, naive optimism was unwarranted.

What skills and abilities she concealed were still unclear. Most prominently of all, Lancelot was a perfect example.

No matter how few the number of authorities, sharply honed powers could easily surpass a hundred authorities—

Powerful beings of that sort existed in the world. Godou raised his wariness to the maximum level.

'Fufufu. Please rest assured, for I have no intention of harming you, Kusanagi-sama. I am simply extending an invitation to you, Kusanagi-sama, for a delightful conversation.'

"You not only sent an invitation but also monsters to attack."

'Because Kusanagi-sama is someone worthy of being called the peerless warrior, a rejection of my invitation would be disastrous. I cannot rest assured unless one or two limbs of yours are twisted off for good measure!'

What kind of reason was that!? Godou was dumbstruck. This goddess was completely different from all the deities he had encountered so far.

Approachable and open to conversation on a superficial level, but communicating on a subtly different wavelength in actual fact. Truly a challenge to handle.

"Doesn't twisting off an arm or a leg count as intention to harm...?"

"Or perhaps from the perspective of an immortal goddess, that level of injury isn't really considered as harm...?"

Hardly surprisingly, Ena and Erica were whispering to each other as they covered their faces.

However, the "Fire Goddess" was unconcerned with the private whispers of lowly humans. Sonorously, she chanted:

'O one who derives enjoyment from flames, please bestow your pleasures upon us.'

Sparks flew down from the sky again.

This time, the receiver was the divine eagle flying leisurely above the sea. Then the bird's massive body together with its fifteen-meter wingspan was suddenly engulfed in flames.

Flapping its wings powerfully and majestically, the bird flew in a beeline straight towards the shore where Godou's group was located.

This was literally the flight of the "firebird." Swiftly, Liliana shot using the bow of Jonathan.

"Go—!"

The arrow of blue light flew towards the flaming bird and split itself into five.

The sacred arrow traced out five trajectories in the sky, striking the burning body of the divine eagle—

But all the arrows were incinerated by the flames and disappeared. The enemy was apparently protected by the flames.

The burning divine eagle continued to fly towards Godou and his group's position. Even if not scorched by the flames, they were going to be ripped apart by the divine eagle's beak and claws directly.

With the [Boar] currently immobilized, Kusanagi Godou had no available means to intercept the attack!

The instant Godou realized he was out of options, Ena suddenly sprang into action. Raising Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high , she yelled out spell words.

"O divine sword that has long protected Japan through the ages! Leave my hand for now and may the curses of foreign nations be infused in this sword. Bestow upon us your protection. —Erica-san , please use this!"

Ena proceeded to stab the divine sword into the beach before them.

These were desperate words of permission. Brilliant beyond compare, the red knight gradually displayed an expression of understanding on her beautiful face. Erica nodded immediately.

"Allow me to express my gratitude for entrusting things to me. —Senatus consultum ultimum!"

Erica began to invoke magic for constructing the most secure defensive barrier.

Beside her, Liliana also swiftly spoke up.

"Erica, I will help too! For the sake of maintaining order in Rome, the Senate decreed the suspension of imperium!"

The blue knight recited an incantation to assist her childhood friend's spell.

The two knights' spell words and magical power were channeled into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi that Ena had relinquished to use as a "catalyst."

Although only for a few minutes, this defensive spell had managed in the past to resist the attack of divine messengers sent by the sky god Melqart.

The jet black divine sword's cold blade was infused with this protective power.

A barrier of black light was released from Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, covering Godou's group like a canopy. At the very last moment, the incoming attack of the flying firebird was blocked!

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!!

The divine eagle cawed with frustration.

The giant bird, enveloped in roaring flames, spread its majestic wings and struck with its beak from the air, trying to shatter the black canopy. However, the barrier constructed by [Senatus Consultum Ultimum] still managed to repel the attack.

Strengthened by the goddess' spell, the flaming bird's power far surpassed ordinary divine beasts.

Ama no Murakumo's divine might. Liliana's assistance. Erica's own progress.

Combined with the two-second window of opportunity, this barrier was the result achieved.

This was only possible thanks to the progress made in the girls' teamwork after all.

However—

'Fufufu. The source of this child's fire has yet to extinguish. Now please start burning once more!'

The goddess' spell words and sparks once again descended upon the divine eagle's back.

A "fire" was lit up in accordance with her words. An explosion of fire was swiftly released from the giant bird's wings. The roaring flames spread over the black canopy, swirling all around it .

The temperature instantly rose inside the barrier protecting Godou's group.

On this seaside that was clearly in midwinter, the feeling was like being baked in a sauna. The heat of the divine flames were finally invading the barrier's interior!

"O exalted god of Susa, please grant us tempestuous wind!"

"May lawful justice be meted out to the traitorous enemies of Rome!"

Ena used the power of divine possession to summon a tornado in an attempt to blow away the divine eagle overhead. On the other hand, Liliana infused the barrier with greater magical power for reinforcement. But in spite of their efforts—

All they managed to do was slightly shake the divine eagle's massive body. The temperature continued to rise.

"Guh...! Godou, we can't hold for long!"

If this continued, the heat was going to vaporize them.

Erica called out, her face drenched with sweat. Currently, she was bearing the greatest strain as the one who invoked the barrier. Nevertheless, she remained as glamorous as a rose.

Confronted with Erica's Blandelli's wonderful quality and true worth, Godou gritted his teeth.

Ever since his companions were creating the barrier, he had been busy preparing "a certain task." For this purpose, he was trying his best to raise his magical power to the max.

But it was still insufficient—

Clearly with just a little more, I could rouse that guy to the limit !

Are we going to vaporize just like this? Or crushed along with the black canopy by the flaming divine eagle? —Just as these two worst possible outcomes were about to materialize before his eyes.. .

Yuri walked over to Erica's side.

Without any combat ability, she was always the Hime-Miko who waited quietly in the back in battle situations.

"Mariya!?"

As Godou called out to her in surprise, Yuri brought her hands together before her chest and closed her eyes.

It was a motion akin to offering a prayer. Immediately, the elegant Hime-Miko's entire body emitted white light.

"A prayer offered to the gods, Kami-musubi, Takami-musubi, Iku-musubi, Taru-musubi, Tamatsume-musubi, Oomiya-no-me, Oomeketsu-no-kami, Kotoshironushi. Pacify the spirit in response to the diviner, may tranquility manifest...!"

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!!

Bathed in the white light released by Yuri, the fiery bird cawed in discomfort. At the same time, one could feel what seemed to be a gust of cool wind. Although it was not much, it still managed to suppress the heat.

"Godou-san. Even if it only amounts to a brief while, I shall endure! So please—!"

The Hime-Miko declared with a look of desperation.

The white light was apparently a new spirit power the Hime-Miko had acquired. Bathed in the white light, the divine eagle looked as if it had been tamed slightly.

This divine favor that suppressed a minion of the gods, was it an application of psychic sensing?

In any case, there was no time to ponder this matter. Rather, Godou intensified his thoughts. Now was the time to focus his concentration on completing the "task" at hand.

The precious time bought by his comrades could not be squandered so easily!

"Come on, surely you can't be satisfied with things ending like this..."

Godou had been firing off taunts repeatedly in his mind.

Now he spoke aloud, directing his words towards the [Beast] whose wrath was seething like boiling magma.

"If that's what you really want, I'm not going to summon you ever again. Show me your spirit right here!"

Although these were rather ungracious words, they were still spell words. The goal was to infuse the maximum amount of magical power into the black beast—the [Boar].

Immobilized by the rubbery sea serpent, Verethragna's fifth incarnation was disgracefully disarmed. Godou's taunts served as the detonator to further raise the [Boar]'s power.

Then came a response.

Still imprisoned by the sea serpent, the [Boar] released a sound from the depths of its throat.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...

A low groaning noise. It was unlike the [Boar]'s usual strenuous roars that exploded with power.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo...

It squeezed a little more out. Into these bellows the [Boar] channeled the rage it felt towards the sea serpent binding it.

oooooooooooooooooooooo...

The [Boar] stopped groaning. This meant the prelude was over. Starting now, a climax was going to start instantly. The black divine beast opened its mouth wide.

"Everyone get down! Cover your ears!"

Godou immediately yelled out.

The trio, Liliana, Ena and Erica swiftly did as ordered. Then Yuri frantically laid herself down on the beach. After checking that everyone had covered their ears with their hands, Godou issued the command: "Go for it!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
!

The powerful roar and shockwave was released from the [Boar]'s mouth.

Releasing shockwaves that accompanied its cries had always been part of the [Boar]'s repertoire. This time, due to the rage from its immobilized state, the power output had sublimated to the greatest possible.

First, the sea serpents body imprisoning the black giant beast was ripped apart and sent flying instantly.

Next, in the manner of a fire-breathing monster, the [Boar] unleashed the strongest ultrasound and shockwave it had ever produced.

Struck directly by this attack, the fiery bird was blown away high into the sky.

The fire enveloping its body also dissipated. The [Boar]'s attack had clearly caused the bird substantial damage, to the point of losing the will to fight. Like a crashing jet plane, the divine eagle flew unsteadily towards the southern sky.

Then the [Boar] twisted its body as if throwing a tantrum, firing shockwaves in all directions.

Struck by this wave of attacks, the goddess' silhouette also disappeared.

The [Boar] was also unexpectedly(?) a sacred beast. Although the extent of the effect was unknown, its voice was apparently capable of blowing apart and scattering divine power.

'Well. How truly ferocious! Now that is truly a display worthy of my Kusanagi-sama!'

Despite the silhouette's disappearance, the goddess' voice continued to offer jestful commentary.

Most likely she did not receive any injury. On this front, the [Boar]'s howls had even scattered all of the dark clouds hanging over the night sky.

Then once the echoes of the extra strength roars finally died down—

Peace and quiet returned to Kimigahama and Cape Inubou at last.

'How truly splendid, Kusanagi-sama! You have exhibited your might very clearly. Fufu, you are the hero who slew glorious Victory to usurp his authority, I see. In that case, I do have a corresponding strategy. I look forward to our next encounter, Kusanagi-sama!'

These whispers were even mixed into the sea breezes blowing across the shore.

But this was a troublesome declaration of a subsequent encounter. Godou exchanged glances with his companions successively and sighed.

Part 4

After the skirmish at Kimigahama, a night had passed and it was 8am the next morning.

After the battle, Godou and the girls had returned to the hotel to rest. All of them agreed that the goddess most likely would not attack again in rapid succession.

Naturally, if any emergency arose, they were always ready to head to the scene immediately.

Fortunately, the night went by without incident, allowing them a peaceful sleep until morning.

Currently, Godou, Liliana and Yuri, the three of them were gathered in the hotel's dining room, having breakfast.

Arranged on the dining table was food such as flavored seaweed and fermented soybeans called nattou. A proper traditional Japanese inn breakfast. Currently absent, Erica was sleeping in as usual. As for Ena, she was still resting from the fatigue sustained from the use of divine possession.

Her roommate Yuri had taken care not to waken her sleeping childhood friend when leaving their room quietly.

"By the way, Mariya Yuri, is your condition really fine?"

"Ah yes. Although I was tired from overuse of power, I am now finally fine after a good night's rest."

Yuri answered Liliana's verification with a calm expression.

Last night, this Hime-Miko had used a white and glowing spirit power to buy them precious time. After the battle ended, she had told the others about this type of power known as [Spirit Pacification].

Bringing one's level of psychic sensing to the maximum, a spell to radiate the Hime-Miko's tranquil soul—

That was how she explained it. Using a heart of harmony to pacify fervorous magical power, all sorts of mysterious and

supernatural phenomena could be calmed. Since this ability proved effective against the "firebird," it could be considered a trump card on the same level as Erica and Liliana's [Smiting].

Nevertheless, it was apparently quite draining. After the battle, Yuri collapsed, completely depleted of strength.

Godou was only relieved after seeing her get up this morning without any ill effects. Liliana probably felt the same. The trio proceeded to finish breakfast leisurely.

"Finding a hero... That was what the goddess mentioned."

Liliana spoke as she drank the tea served after the meal.

As a side note, she was currently dressed in a yukata. Despite being a Caucasian girl of Eastern European descent, the look suited her unexpectedly well.

"If that's the case, it explains why she had that arrow shot into Tokyo. Flaunting her servant's archery to provoke 'someone with power,' thereby luring them over."

"In actual fact, that was how Godou-san arrived here."

Similarly dressed in a yukata with a short coat called the *hanten* draped over on top, Yuri nodded in agreement.

Pouring hot water into the green tea powder in two cups, she passed one of them to Godou. Drinking the tea gratefully, Godou found the taste quite agreeable.

More than likely, this delicious taste owed more to Yuri's skill and care than the actual flavor of the green tea powder.

"There's probably no special reason why the Tokyo Tower became the target... It just happened to be a tall structure and particularly conspicuous, right?"

If Godou had not made his way here, would all the tall buildings in the Kantou region be sniped one after another?

The Tokyo City Hall at Shinjuku, or skyscrapers at various places such as Roppongi, Ikebukuro, Shibuya... Godou muttered as he imagined.

"Seriously. Yet another troublesome deity appeared."

"Yes, indeed." "Quite a serious situation..."

Yuri and Liliana concurred with Godou's conclusion without objection. Nevertheless, they seemed to be casting a gaze towards him as if they had something to say.

"Hmm, what's the matter with you two?"

"Well no, regarding that, I believe there is more than an element of chance in you being the 'someone with power' the goddess encounters. A sufficiently strong ability to 'attract' those sorts of things..."

"Really, drawn in as if by fate every single time..."

Attracting what? Drawing in what? Neither Yuri nor Liliana were explicit.

However, their eyes secretly conveyed a cold and critical attitude. Somehow feeling uncomfortable, Godou shrank back from their gaze.

At this moment, a savior appeared. Amakasu had returned.

Dressed in a suit rather than a yukata, he had not returned to the hotel last night but was busy handling the aftermath instead.

"Ah, good morning everyone. Last night sure was tiring."

Hearing this from someone whose labors vastly surpassed their own, Godou felt rather apologetic. At the same time, Yuri suddenly stood up and bowed her head deeply towards Amakasu.

"I am truly sorry for last night. I cannot believe we did that sort of thing again... I am certain we must have caused a great deal of trouble to everyone. Please forgive us."

He really had been too careless last night. Recalling this, Godou also bowed his head.

Back when the [Boar] had released the extra strength shockwave, a portion of it had flown towards the cape like a stray bullet, thus demolishing the Cape Inubou lighthouse.

This was where the sun rose earliest in the entire Kantou region, an extremely popular tourist spot for watching the sunrise on New Year's day. And very soon, New Year's Eve was approaching...

After discovering the atrocious act he had committed, Godou began scratching his head.

Erica went "Oh well" and expressed admiration while Liliana simply closed her eyes silently. Yuri was quietly going "Godou-san ..." with worry whereas Ena exclaimed "Ooh—" instead—

"No no, this is part of my job."

On the other hand, Amakasu was answering in a frivolous tone of voice to the Hime-Miko who bowed her head and apologized sincerely.

"Currently from the way it looks, this level of damage is no different from that caused by inserting an advertising leaflet in a book. It's akin to mechanical defects which unflatteringly lie on the boundary of quality control standards despite high performance production. But anyway, since we are relying on your assistance, Kusanagi-san, please don't let it weigh on your mind."

Poking fun at what Godou had done, Amakasu smiled briefly.

"But the apology just now really sounded like a wife apologizing desperately for a hopeless husband's misconduct. No, perhaps that really is the case."

"W-Wife—Please do not say something so bizarre!"

"Indeed, Amakasu Touma. P-Please pay more attention to your frivolous words!"

Yuri began to get flustered while Liliana angered somewhat.

Being the main culprit, Godou tried to dispel the awkward atmosphere by changing the subject.

"B-By the way, those monsters arrived by crossing the sea, right ?"

"Yes. Via the Kuroshio Current."

The special agent had most likely collected intelligence from the surrounding area starting last night.

Relying on his decidedly competent talents, he was able to answer immediately.

"Because it was a long distance expedition undertaken by divine beasts, interested parties related to the Committee and those in the wizardry field were able to sense them. After that, ideas such as ' Attack of the Mysterious Giant Monsters!' were conveyed to organizations including the Maritime Self Defense Force and the coast guard. Thanks to that, we were able to track down the basic route traveled by the divine beasts."

"I think the goddess yesterday said she came from outside of Japan."

"A stalkerish [Heretic God] who has her sights set on Kusanagi-san. Yes, this aspect is rather fitting. Oh dear, that group of monsters happens to have a stronghold."

Hearing unexpected news, Godou stared with his eyes wide open.

Yuri and Liliana reacted the same way. Stronghold. This was a term quite removed from [Heretic Gods] who wandered incessantly.

"The serpentine divine beast rode the Kuroshio Current while the bird-like divine beast flew in the sky. That should have been how they reached Cape Inubou from their stronghold. We are currently collecting information about that area."

"Stronghold huh..."

Godou began to ponder. The enemy's target was himself. If he continued living in Tokyo, the next time they showed up, it might really turn into a scene from a monster movie.

During times like these, perhaps he should cast aside notions of pacifism for now and take action instead—?

"Kusanagi Godou. Are you actually intending to head towards that location?"

Liliana asked. She had apparently noticed what Godou was thinking.

"If we let those things invade Tokyo, severe destruction will likely occur. That's why I don't think we can just simply wait around quietly."

"Indeed, perhaps we really should take action..."

Yuri whispered softly with an expression of contemplation.

"It felt like the goddess was quite keen on concealing her true appearance. I believe that is why I could not discern her sacred name and origins."

"If that is the case, then we have no choice but to enter enemy territory to seek clues..."

Liliana also nodded. In this regard, it seemed as though this goddess was similar to Lancelot whose true appearance was hidden behind armor.

Having made his decision, Godou cut straight to the chase and asked:

"Amakasu-san, where is her stronghold?"

"Well said. It is in the region known as the South Seas."

Godou nodded at the geographic name revealed by Amakasu.

Although Yuri and Liliana both widened their eyes, they were not excessively surprised. Since they were dealing with a goddess, it was a completely plausible scenario. Oh well, it did not require any profound prediction in the first place.

A few nights more and the year was going to end. However, Godou was apparently left with no choice but to spend New Year's overseas.

Chapter 4 - Call From the Demonic Realm

Part 1

December 31, New Year's Eve.

Japanese citizens considered it a great event marking the changeover to a new year.

Nevertheless, on this commemorative day, Kusanagi Godou was currently exposed under the sun. This was intense sunlight one would absolutely not find on the islands of Japan during winter.

Scorching sun. Air filled with heat and humidity. The familiar taste of midsummer.

The city of Tokyo was approximately 35 degrees in latitude. Shifting south from there by roughly 30 degrees, Godou's current location was practically on the equator.

Geographically speaking, this was Borneo's northern shore, a city called Kota Kinabalu located in Malaysian territory.

"I never imagined I'd spend New Year's in a place like this..."

Godou muttered with deep feeling.

Kota Kinabalu was the largest city in the region.

This ocean-facing city contained beautiful beaches. Resort hotels could be found everywhere.

Godou was currently situated downtown where quite a few shopping centers and food courts were concentrated. It was a crowded and prosperous place.

"It feels nothing like New Year's Eve here."

"It feels strange for me. Ever since childhood, this is the first time I am not busy with miko duties this time of the year..."

Yuri commented from beside Godou with a slightly concerned expression.

It was currently after 2pm and the group was taking a short break at an open-air cafe.

Godou ordered iced coffee while Yuri had iced milk tea. In this tropical zone where the weather was like summer all year round, it was only natural to thirst for iced drinks.

There was one more item on the bill. Fresh avocado juice with condensed milk.

This viscous drink, thick enough for a straw to stand upright in the middle, was of course Erica's order.

"Indeed, only someone like Godou would be visited by troublesome matters all the time."

The discussion held with Amakasu at the Cape Inubou hotel occurred two days ago.

After Godou declared a direct assault on the enemy's stronghold, the History Compilation Committee member immediately set about gathering information.

While that was proceeding, Godou and his companions returned to Tokyo and prepared to travel overseas.

Once everything was ready, they boarded a flight late at night on December 30.

After a night's sleep on the plane, they landed in Singapore in the morning. Then taking a connecting flight from there, they arrived today—the morning of December 31, at this city of Kota Kinabalu.

In Godou's company were the four girls, Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena.

The one who organized this trip was surprisingly the girl known as the [Diavolo Rosso].

"The History Compilation Committee is simply an organization controlling a single country—Japan, without branch outposts or influence in foreign lands... Hence, this time they are 'backing us up but not officially,' acting entirely as sponsors who happen to be on site."

Shaking the light green juice as she drank, Erica explained.

"But even for you, the [Copper Black Cross] doesn't have branches everywhere, right?"

"Not everywhere, but the [Copper Black Cross] happens to have permanent staff posted here. This provides the credibility for us to be introduced to a local person of influence. Since the [Heretic God] has been causing them hardship, they are greatly looking forward to Devil King Kusanagi Godou's arrival."

"W-What Devil King's arrival, it's not supposed to be like that..."

Godou's face twitched in response to hearing Erica's way of phrasing things.

"By the way, Erica-san. What kind of person is this person of influence?"

Taking a sip of her iced milk tea, Yuri inquired.

Erica had selected Yuri as one of the people accompanying Godou on their visit to the local person of influence. "Because Yuri's power is probably needed" was her explanation.

"I heard that this country has neither an organization like Japan's History Compilation Committee nor large scale associations like the ones in Europe... But among the commonfolk there are those who live by fortune telling and wizardry."

"Indeed it seems to be so."

Erica nodded and continued:

"In this part of Southeast Asia, there aren't any intelligence agencies or associations with outstanding power and influence. But you see, wouldn't former yakuza or mafia have quite a bit of prestige and influence in a place like this?"

"Y-Yaku—!?"

"Come to think of it, that feels like a pretty good description of Yinghua's family..."

"Yes, Hong Kong's Lu family is a classic example of cartel operations in Southeast Asia and other places. A gathering of proudly competent talent, spellcasters and even the poor, using them to operate various legal and illegal enterprises."

The trio conversed in these matters as the drinks slaked their thirst. Then they left the cafe.

Godou was dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and hemp cargo pants which he had not worn for quite some time ever since the weather cooled.

Erica had a red camisole and ankle-length black pants. Yuri, on the other hand, was wearing a refreshing one-piece dress in white.

Leaving from Japan in midwinter, they were plunged into a land of summer heat all at once.

Although it was a little sudden, the hot weather felt quite nostalgic after months of absence. Indeed, there was an unexpected sense of freshness and delight.

Furthermore, Liliana and Ena had gone out shopping for this " expedition."

Indeed, the streets of Kota Kinabalu was not their final destination. This was merely a place along the way.

Godou and Yuri followed Erica as she walked. Along the way, the sky suddenly gave rise to a downpour of rain. A shower brought by a squall.

As expected of a tropical zone. Apparently, chances of sudden showers were quite high during the afternoon.

The trio frantically sought shelter in a food court.

After buying food to one's liking from a row of food vendors, one could sit down and eat at an empty table. This type of sheltered food court was quite common throughout the city of Kota Kinabalu.

"It really rains quite heavily here."

The pitter-patter of raindrops striking the rooftops and road surface was quite intense.

Godou's clothes were completely drenched. Nevertheless, this unexpected inconvenience was actually enjoyable, for it offered the experience of a climate and culture completely different from Japan's. A very real sense of concreteness.

"Anyway, since the weather is so hot, our clothes will dry soon enough..."

Carrying this sort of joyful mood, Godou turned to his two female companions only to be rendered speechless.

Erica and Yuri were dressed in flimsy summer clothing. Due to being drenched by the sudden rain, their clothes now clung tightly to their bodies.

Consequently, their bodies' lines of curvature became particular clear to view.

Furthermore, Yuri's one-piece dress was white. Even her drenched underwear was visible beneath her dress—

"G-Godou-san. Could you please stop staring like that?!"

"Oh my, what a rare act of initiative. Does this stem from the liberating feeling of traveling overseas?"

Reacting to the girls' comments, Godou frantically turned his gaze away.

While Godou focused on directing his gaze elsewhere until the girls' clothes dried, the trio strolled around the food court that provided shelter from the rain.

Seeing all sorts of food displayed at the food stands, Erica narrowed her eyes.

"Just as I thought, Asian places like this are the top choice for a chaotic culinary experience. Although Japan is a country of comfort, it hasn't lived up to my expectations in the area of food."

A bunch of total nonsense.

But Godou could understand. He could tell from a single glance . This was indeed the type of place Erica would enjoy.

Representative of Malay cuisine was the spicy fried rice dish of *nasi goreng*, made with chicken resembling *yakitori* meat and a sauce prepared from peanuts and coconut milk. That could be considered the basics. Then there was the Malaysian burger containing a hamburger patty wrapped in an omelette.[18] This type of food could be considered the applied version of Malay cuisine.

Chinese cuisine prepared by ethnic Chinese also added much variety and color to the offerings.

There were also Indian curry shops as well as all sorts of global fast food chains, etc.

There were even seafood shops where one picked fish from a tank to be barbecued. Furthermore, tropical fruit varieties were sold, such as the king of fruits, the pungent durian.

Other than pork which was conspicuously absent in Islamic areas, this was truly the place for a chaotic culinary experience.

"It'd be nice to look for and have a fill of food to my liking..."

"Let's not eat now since we have an appointment later. How about we wait until dinner time, okay?"

Stopping Erica, Godou gave Yuri a glance to seek her agreement .

To his great surprise, the Yamato Nadeshiko was unexpectedly staring at a food stand with great interest.

"Mariya... Could it be, you're hungry?"

"Ah, no. Not at all. I am just curious."

Yuri answered shyly as she looked back.

"In the past when traveling in Vietnam with my family, I only tried noodles from this kind of shop once. Thinking back, the food

was really quite delicious. Fufu, I remember we were eating it on the go."

"In that case, Yuri, you may count on me, Erica Blandelli."

The blonde devil winked at the sheltered young lady who was smiling calmly.

"Back when I was in Hong Kong, I ate at stands like these every single day."

"Really!? If I may, then I shall count on you!"

"Indeed. That looks about right, undoubtedly so."

Godou began to smile wryly in response to Erica and Yuri's enthusiasm, seemingly sharing some sort of strange motivation.

Despite being clearly well-educated girls, they did not seem particularly bothered by these vendors' hygiene.

"Erica aside, I never knew that Mariya had quite a strong-willed side to her."

"M-Me, do I really seem strong-willed to you?"

Yuri murmured while smiling with a slightly delighted expression.

Godou's careless comment seemed to have pleased the dignified Yamato Nadeshiko. While Godou was baffled by the reason, Erica mocked sarcastically.

"What an idiot you are, Godou. Getting along with someone like Godou would surely require Yuri to harbor a resolute will of iron somewhere in the depths of her heart. It's something one would acquire and develop after staying by your side for so long."

"I-I see..."

Recalling his various instances of unruly conduct, Godou expressed understanding while Yuri smiled wryly with a troubled expression.

While they conversed on a variety of topics, the rain had stopped before they knew it. The sky was clear and sunny once more.

Due to the rain just now, the air temperature had cooled somewhat, giving a cooler refreshing feeling. Godou and Yuri continued to follow Erica, making their way to a certain market.

In actual fact, they had already visited this place once already before taking the break at the open-air cafe.

At the time, it was simply an empty clearing. But now, an hour later, tents had been raised all over the place, with little stands and open-air stalls lined in rows side by side.

Everyday sundries, vegetables, fruits and various wares were being sold.

However, most eye-catching of all was the seafood. There were not only species commonly sold in Tokyo such as horse mackerel,

Spanish mackerel, barracuda, squid, but also colorful fishes unique to the South Seas like the yellowback fusilier.

Glancing at these shops as they made their way, Erica finally stopped before a certain tent.

This was a vendor selling everyday sundries. In the depths of the store was a petite old lady, dressed modestly in a white shirt with a black skirt. She had the lightly tanned skin tones of ethnic Malays. Alone by herself, she was sitting in a folding chair.

Based on appearance, she seemed like a friendly "old granny."

However, she was actually the "person of influence" that Erica had mentioned earlier. So she was the fortune teller and wizard who acted as the leader of pickpockets, thieves and pirates in the area?

"Your Majesty, arriving from distant lands, a cordial welcome to you."

The influential old lady greeted Godou using broken English.

Then she clapped her hands together and bowed slowly towards Godou as one would pay respects to a Buddha statue.

Part 2

Two days earlier at Cape Inubou, Amakasu was explaining about the divine beasts' stronghold.

'The South Seas is a region of the ocean containing over a hundred islands of various sizes, located west of the Philippines and northwest of Borneo. These islands came in all sorts, with some uninhabited, some with resort hotels built on them, while some housed military installations of the various surrounding countries."

Amakasu sighed as he spoke.

'Reportedly, on the largest uninhabited island of them all, mysterious giant creatures suddenly appeared several days ago... Yes, those two divine beasts, the snake and the strange bird that came all the way over to Japan last night to cause a commotion."

'They are already confirmed to have returned to the island in the South China Sea after their defeat at Kusanagi-san's hands. It really reminds me of those monster movies from the Shouwa era, this monster island appearing in Southeast Asian seas...'

Although the tone of Amakasu's report was frivolous, there was little joking in the content.

Hence, Godou and his group traveled to Kota Kinabalu to deal with the problematic island. Using this city as a staging ground, they first investigated the island's state of affairs—

And now in a Kota Kinabalu market, they were currently meeting a representative of the local wizardry scene.

"We cannot express our utmost gratitude well enough for Your Majesty's express visit..."

"D-Don't mention it. I intend to investigate the island's situation to get a clear idea first."

Godou began to get flustered because the influential old lady kept bowing repeatedly with her hands together to show her gratitude.

Rather than a king, it was more like being treated as a Buddha. This was quite a difference in treatment compared to other people Godou had encountered who were involved in the field.

"I will prepare ships immediately. But our utmost apologies... Though the island surfaced three years ago, we know very little about it..."

As the old lady explained in an unhurried fashion, Godou was baffled by the mentioning of "three years."

"Oh my, it was on a certain day three years ago, when that island had surfaced on the sea by the time we noticed. It was a place that was originally empty sea. Thus abruptly did it appear. The island has mountains and forests. For such a rather normal-looking island to suddenly emerge, the fishermen, the pirates and the navy were all greatly surprised."

Godou threw a glance at his companion. Erica nodded in response.

She apparently knew already but had kept it to herself for some reason.

"And the very strange thing was, once anyone lands on the island, they could not get out..."

"Not get out?"

"According to our members who have set foot on the island, they naturally got lost in the middle of walking around. Then for a good many days, they were disoriented along their way to the beach. Only the lucky ones reached the ship to return from the island..."

Godou recalled someone he knew.

Why would that guy be involved in this incident—? He looked at Erica again to find her with an expression as if she wanted to say something. "Indeed this is the case" was what she seemed to be saying.

"It is an island that did not exist in this country before. Hence, no local sailor will approach it. Only people like us are privy to this knowledge..."

This island was not recorded on any maps or marine atlases, huh. As Godou nodded, the old lady put her hands together again and knelt in worship.

"We would be most grateful if Your Majesty could be so kind as to head to the island for a look. Please, we are counting on you."

"Granny, may we have a look at the object?"

Erica interjected.

"The object... Ah yes, the thing that drifted to a nearby beach three years ago, shortly after the island appeared. I believe it should be related to some particular god..."

The old lady stood up and began to search a wooden box behind her.

She took a slender rod-shaped stone, roughly a meter in length, its girth just barely small enough to grasp in one hand. Its uneven surface was jet black like obsidian.

Godou could feel faint magical power emanating from the black stone. Some kind of power resided in it apparently.

As soon as she looked at the stone, Yuri shuddered.

"Did you see something, Yuri? This object could be a divine artifact, so please try to appraise it. Perhaps this might be a decisive clue?"

"V-Very well. This is—"

Asked by Erica, the Hime-Miko spoke an oracle solemnly.

"Using the divine artifact of creation, the mother created land out of the primordial sea, summoning freshwater, nurturing lush vegetation... We have already seen a similar item before."

Yuri deliberately added the last sentence, for apparently the same doubt had crossed her mind.

Yes. Last time, there was also a mysterious island that suddenly appeared in the sea. All who entered the island were disoriented by the magical power of a labyrinth. Furthermore, the island was created using the alleged nation-founding divine artifact that appeared in the form of a small tool—

Godou nodded, Erica crossed her arms, while Yuri looked worried.

Surely the trio must have recalled the same image.

Two hours later, Godou and his group were out at sea.

The tropical ocean was dyed bright orange by the glow of the setting sun. A large sport fisher was speeding nimbly across the sea. More accurately, it should be called a sunset cruise.

This was the ship prepared by the old lady at the market for Godou's group.

Equipped with showers and air conditioning, the ship's spacious cabin was like the living room of a house. There were even two rooms with cots. This was a large ship used for living out at sea for days to enjoy the pleasures of fishing.

—The waters of the mysterious island were located not far from Kota Kinabalu.

Supposed to be reached before night, it meant they should be able to observe the island's situation from afar before daylight

ended. It would be ideal if the deity incident could be resolved before it expanded in scale. For this purpose, the trio converged with Liliana and Ena then proceeded to board this ship.

Sailors from the old lady's subordinates were in charge of operating the ship.

Presently, Godou and his friends were holding a strategy conference in the cabin.

Seated, Liliana Kranjcar opened the discussion with a gloomy expression:

"This is simply speculation. Although there exist 'reasons for thinking so,' I think subjecting a certain person to allegations would be jumping to conclusions. Nevertheless, I shall still proceed with this thought."

She was dressed in casual clothing with a blue lacy blouse and black shorts. Even so, Liliana spoke like a knight in a rigorous tone .

"I believe England's Black Prince is very likely related to this incident."

Possessing the labyrinth authority, Alexandre Gascoigne was involved in the past incident of the Heavenly Reverse Halberd and the floating island.

As expected, Liliana was thinking of that commotion. It was only natural. Everyone thought so too. After all, even Ena exclaimed with deep feeling despite her optimistic personality.

"It's that saying, right? As suspicious as being caught with your hand in the cookie jar."

Definitely suspicious no matter what. Godou voiced his agreement with the possibility and nodded.

Also, Seishuuin Ena had finally changed out of her usual uniform after leaving Japan. She was currently dressed in a short-sleeved parka with cargo pants, a style common to men in summer.

The supplies Liliana and Ena had bought at the market during the day were currently left in a corner of the cabin. The cardboard box was stuffed full of equipment, clothing and food, etc. They had simply picked up anything they thought might be useful for exploring an uninhabited island in the South Seas.

"Think about it, that guy used rather elaborate methods when he caused the Tokyo Bay commotion. He was also quite clear on how to use a divine artifact like the Heavenly Reverse Halberd..."

"Because he had an opportunity to test out a similar plan before. .. This is quite possible."

Godou muttered and Erica concurred.

This was a conversation that could easily veer into slander with one false step. The only one who abstained from participating was Yuri, who listened to everyone with a troubled expression. But perhaps she was simply born naturally polite.

On occasion she would go "Indeed..." and nod in agreement. She did not display any intention of objecting.

"So currently, where is that Gascoigne guy anyway?"

"Unknown as usual. But earlier, there were reports of him in Spain."

As Godou wondered, Erica answered immediately, fully prepared as expected.

"Well, it's not like he'll answer honestly even if we ask him directly. Let's continue to investigate step by step..."

While they chatted, the ship successfully arrived near the problematic island.

They were about to reach the destination, the Indian sailors reported. Godou and his group stopped their discussion and walked out onto the deck which offered an expansive view of the South China Sea illuminated by the evening glow of the sunset.

Were this a sightseeing trip, this scenery would definitely be quite moving.

However, the "island" ten-odd kilometers ahead was the lair where those suspicious divine beasts resided. Moreover, anyone entering arbitrarily would be imprisoned by the labyrinth's power. This was literally a demonic realm.

It was definitely no small island, given its substantial visible area.

Rather tall elevations in the center of the island could be seen from the sea afar. A rough estimate would place the altitude as comparable to ordinary mountains. The island was covered with trees, offering a lush green view.

The ship cruised straight forward, landing on the island at a cove that resembled an entrance.

"It's bigger than I imagined..."

Muttering to himself, Godou suddenly realized.

"Speaking of which, how long do Gascoigne's labyrinths last for ? Left here for three years already, it can still be sustained?"

"Assuming Prince Alec is absent from the island, the magical effects should start dissipating after roughly three or four months."

"From then on, the magical effects will gradually weaken all over the labyrinth. This is recorded in the Witenagemot's reports."

Erica and Liliana answered, highly knowledgeable.

"Then it isn't really that guy...? It's hard to imagine a busy guy like him coming here regularly."

"Conversely, assuming he is going that far, this might be quite an important location?"

"Alternatively, some kind of spell or divine artifact may have been used to extend the duration of his authority's effects."

From the swiftness of the counterarguments, the moral failings of the person in question were clear to see.

Oh well, this was all due to the deplorable nature of his habitual behavior...

In any case, the plan was set to begin investigating and scouting out the island tonight. Although Godou was not much help in this regard, the girls were a separate case altogether. Liliana's witchcraft and Yuri's exceptional spirit vision were especially sure to produce results.

Hence everyone began to make preparations on the ship.

...They definitely could not afford to be careless.

Godou and Ena were both very sensitive to danger given their keen, beast-like instincts. Erica and Liliana were also on watch in full alert. Furthermore, Yuri was present with her incomparably sharp spiritual senses.

Nevertheless, in spite of all that, no one was able to detect the imminent arrival of the incoming attack.

—An astounding gust of wind suddenly swept across the ship's deck.

Completely caught unprepared, the ship's sailors and even Erica and Liliana were blown away by the wind. With a series of splashing noises sounding from the night sea after the sun had set, all of them fell into the water.

The only one unaffected was Godou who was left standing alone on deck.

It was no natural wind. Most likely supernatural wind produced through magic and divine powers, hence a Campione's body was unaffected—

"Godou!" "Kusanagi Godou!"

Erica and Liliana's voices were heard from the sea beyond the ship.

Sounds of the crew's screams suggested that everyone were unharmed.

Instead, the place of danger was actually Godou's side on the ship. Namely, the large sport fisher's cabin. A familiar bird monster was casually landing on top of the ceiling.

This was the divine eagle they had encountered a few days earlier. The sudden gust of wind had been its doing!

Godou quickly came to a conclusion. Was this divine eagle able to make effective use of some kind of cheating skill to teleport unannounced? Most probably not.

Surely it was the Fire Goddess' doing—a spell cast by the unidentified deity.

Part 3

Spreading its wings with intense vigor, the divine eagle prepared to take flight. Its massive wingspan measured fifteen meters.

It flapped its wings forcefully. With the cabin firmly in the grip of its claws, the rest of the ship attached was at its mercy. Effortlessly as though the ship's weight was no burden, the divine eagle floated upwards—

By the time he noticed, Godou found himself and the entire ship already flying in the air.

Night had descended completely. Countless stars were twinkling in the black canopy of the night sky.

Different constellations were visible compared to back in Japan. This tropical starlit sky was breathtaking in its beauty. The clear and bright half moon was also shining with white brilliance.

"Uh, we're getting this close to the clouds!?"

Imperceptibly, they had already risen to quite a high altitude. Godou frantically rushed over to the ship's edge and looked below .

The sea was a long way down. Although this was comparable to the height that Liliana had flown him during the Saturnus incident, Godou completely did not feel any sense of rapid ascent.

The bird really was quite skilled at flying.

Although Godou currently had nothing on him to secure himself, there was no worry of tumbling off the ship to fall down from the sky.

The divine eagle was flying with great stability, apparently taking care to keep the deck level. Thanks to this, Godou did not even lose balance once.

Godou gazed at the divine eagle gliding leisurely on its outspread wings.

Its stately majesty as the king of birds could be felt from the divine eagle's intrepid appearance, worthy of being called a sacred bird. Currently on the ship's deck, Godou looked up to examine the state of the divine eagle that was holding the cabin in its claws.

Although the divine eagle was in a completely defenseless posture with its abdomen and throat exposed, one should not forget it was flying quite stably.

It would take a bold move. Oh well, if he attacked despite the height, the worst that could happen would be crashing down together. Perhaps there was no need to be wary...

"Your Majesty!" "Godou-san!"

Godou jumped in surprise to hear sudden voices calling him.

Looking towards the opened cabin door, he found Yuri and Ena walking out onto the deck. Come to think of it, these two were not seen when everyone else had fallen into the sea. So it was because they were actually inside the ship!

The two girls ran over to Godou's side.

"Let's summon Ama no Murakumo to give it a good slice—Never mind, I guess we'd better endure the situation for now."

The same idea must have crossed Ena's mind as well. She muttered and shrugged.

Carrying the three passengers, the ship was transported by the divine eagle to the sky above the cove.

Owing to the bright moonlight and excellent night vision, Godou was able to clearly discern the island's geography even though it was night.

A mangrove forest grew by the seaside. There were also tropical rainforests which looked as though orangutans might roam inside.

In addition the central mountain peak looked about seven or eight hundred meters in height above sea level. The divine eagle was apparently flying towards this peak as the destination.

Godou went "Hmm?" and frowned in response to the sudden change in the vegetation on the mountain. Strangely enough, these were deciduous trees that grew on highlands. The tropical rainforest atmosphere was all gone.

Of course, they were still in the tropics, but it was rather cool and breezy as a result of the elevation. However, the altitudes here should not be enough for highland vegetation to grow.

"As expected of an island inhabited by the gods. I can feel it. There is a strong divine presence on this sacred mountain. It must be quite an excellent sanctuary."

"Quite an intense sacred aura can be sensed from the peak. Perhaps the goddess might be there."

Ena, the sacred mountain specialist, reported. Yuri also gave warning through her sharp senses as usual.

Godou turned his gaze downwards. Was it that place roughly seventy or eighty meters from the mountain slope?

As much as he wanted to wait till they were nearer to the ground before taking action, delaying for that long might be too late. What should he do—just as Godou agonized over the decision, the two Hime-Miko nodded to each other.

"Godou-san. Please let us handle this."

"Don't worry, Ena will think of a way to deal with things. Ama no Murakumo, please!"

Their words prompted Godou to make his decision. Nodding, he relaxed his right arm.

Immediately, the divine sword, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, suddenly manifested in Ena's hand. With a three-foot-three-inch blade, its had the structure of a curved Japanese sword. The blade was jet-black in color.

"O divine blade of Ama no Murakumo, bestow upon me the bow and arrows of honor!"

Using spell words to invoke the divine sword's spirit for divine possession, Ena kicked hard against the deck.

Then jumping like a monkey, she delivered a merciless diagonal overarm slash to the abdomen of the divine eagle that had been maintaining the safety of this airborne journey.

Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!! The divine eagle cawed loudly in pain .

Ena jumped again at this time, stabbing the divine sword into the bird's right claw. Consequently, the divine eagle loosened its right claw's grip from the ship's cabin. Crash!

The impact came. Unbalanced in the air, the ship was also losing substantial altitude and fast approaching the mountain

slope. Even a divine eagle was unable to endure, finally loosening its left claw from the ship as well. Thus, the large ship carrying Godou and the girls started free falling towards the ground!

The mountain forest below was quite flourishing with trees. These could act as a cushion to some extent but it would be naive to expect no injuries from a crash landing like this.

The fate awaiting the trio was going to be no different from a plane crash incident. However.

"Ameno Torifune, I pray to the god of the camphorwood ship, sturdy as stone, swift as a waterfowl!"

"Bestow upon us the fulfillment of safe passage!"

The two Hime-Miko chanted spell words together.

The ship's descent suddenly slowed down rapidly. Like a falling feather, the ship drifted lightly down from the sky, sliding gently along the mountain slope and into the deciduous forest.

Although the speed of descent was reduced, the impact was still quite substantial.

The trio fell over forward on the deck. The ship continued to slide along, its momentum showing no apparent signs of abating.

Crash, clang, crunch, crunch. Terrifying noises rang out repeatedly.

Various parts of the ship were smashing into things.

Then the crash-landed ship finally came to a stop. Godou and the two Hime-Miko breathed a long sigh of relief together. At least the trio were safe and sound.

Among the three, Kusanagi Godou was the strongest and also held the leadership role.

Standing up instantly out of a sense of responsibility, Godou looked up into the sky.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!!

The divine eagle let loose an acute cry and flew off somewhere. Was it due to pain from the wound Ena inflicted, or had it received orders to return from its mistress the goddess? In any case, the current crisis seemed to have passed.

However, it was not yet time to relax completely.

Yuri looked worried while Ena displayed nervous tension as the two girls drew near Godou.

They were currently situated on this island of the demonic realm. Even if a thorough investigation was conducted before they entered, unexpected occurrences were bound to appear.

Surely, this was only the beginning of a truly troublesome situation.

Godou's trio were not foolish enough to move about in the darkness of night.

They intended to spend the night by the wrecked sports fisher, waiting until morning before beginning operations.

This was the most prudent course of action in light of the current situation. Godou, Yuri and Ena agreed unanimously.

Fortunately, they were well-stocked with food, mineral water and other drinks. Various equipment for exploring the island were also prepared. Using flashlights for illumination was not too inconvenient.

The trio started a fire using a lighter and boiled some water.

A simple and convenient dinner consisted of biscuits, instant coffee and Malaysian cup noodles.

"Come to think of it, Erica is the only one I know who never eats instant noodles. What about you, Mariya?"

During the Kisaragi incident, Godou had shared a dinner with Ena similar to the one tonight, consisting of instant and portable food.

Then what about Yuri the quintessential high-class lady? It was a question posed out of curiosity.

"I guess I have eaten it before. Although my mother hates that type of food, I used to eat it secretly with Ena-san on occasion... Fufu."

"Well, the more people forbid us to eat it, the more we wish to try it out."

Yuri smiled with slight mischief while Ena grinned like a fellow accomplice. Godou was glad to know they were already close friends from long ago.

Watching the two girls' postures as they held the cup noodles, using the wooden chopsticks to pick up the noodles elegantly, Godou felt that their excellent upbringing was clear to see.

Furthermore, due to the extremely cold mountain air, eating hot food felt especially delicious.

Rather than a drop in temperature due to nightfall, it felt more akin to a sudden change of season from summer to winter.

Godou was wearing a long-sleeved parka. Yuri and Ena were also dressed in long-sleeved athletic gear including tracksuits and windbreakers. These clothes were bought back at the city of Kota Kinabalu.

Expecting the possibility of entering the mountains or tropical rainforests, the group had prepared long-sleeved clothes just in case.

"If only we could find a way to make contact with outside."

Godou muttered as he gazed up at the vast starlit sky.

Yuri and Ena had tried several different spells just now in an attempt to contact Erica and Liliana. However, none of the spells could reach beyond the island's exterior.

"Liliana-san's swimming abilities should be excellent as a witch so there shouldn't be any danger even if she fell in the water. But it's a little worrying that we can't confirm if they are safe."

"Even my psychic sensing is not working."

Ena commented and Yuri reported the result of her attempts.

"Reaching out from this mountain with psychic sensing to explore, I encounter a massive obstruction along the way. It prevents me from reaching out to anywhere farther."

Using wizardry for communications or exploration did not seem to work.

As late night arrived, the trio entered the ship and all slept in the cabin. To facilitate collective action in case of emergencies, they stayed together in one place.

Then they decided to take turns in keeping watch.

After all, there was already the precedent of the divine eagle appearing instantaneously without warning.

With the trio in high alert, perhaps they could prevent being caught unaware again. It was best not to be careless. Taking turns in the order of Yuri, Godou then Ena, one person kept watch while the other two covered themselves with blankets and slept.

The rest of the night went by peacefully on the island in the demonic realm and the next morning arrived.

Taking care of breakfast through crude and simple food again, the trio began to freshen up and get ready.

Had this been a simple accident, waiting patiently for rescue would be an option. But since their purpose here was to gather information about this mountain and island, there was no choice but to start acting on their plan.

After spending some time to choose necessary items to carry along with them, they stuffed them into their rucksacks.

Along the way, Godou suddenly recalled something and asked:

"Can't we transport this stuff effortlessly using that whatever spell Erica and Liliana use to summon their swords?"

"That type of spell only works on objects within a sword's size and weight, so it does not help in a situation like this."

"Last time at Nikkou, we also tried spells to move our luggage, but just like investigative magic, it didn't work either..."

In the end, all they could determine was that the situation left little room for optimism.

In any case, once preparations were complete, the trio began to hike.

"Oh yeah, come to think of it, it's January 1 today!"

"Indeed! I am a bit worried, is Hikari's work at Nanao Shrine going smoothly? Although she is quite reliable in general, as a miko she is still an apprentice..."

"As the saying goes, New Year's Day is the time to plan for the incoming year. I can't believe I'd run into this kind of commotion today."

Godou continued to move forward as he confirmed today's date .

Being used to hiking, Ena took the lead with Yuri following and Godou holding the rear.

Under the bright illumination of daylight, they surveyed the surrounding trees.

A deciduous forest. Sunlight streamed between the leaves to produce scattering patterns of radiance, combining with the blowing wind to create a glittering world of golden brilliance. The breeze blowing between the trees was truly cool and refreshing. It was like taking an autumn stroll in a European forest.

"But isn't this a tropical zone located near the equator..."

"It's getting difficult to distinguish the seasons now..."

"This is clear evidence of the fact that this is no ordinary island..."

While confirming the suspicious nature of the island as they walked through the forest, Yuri suddenly went "Ah" softly.

Was this a sign of spirit vision? This prompted Godou to ready his posture but very soon he realized the reason. The surrounding scenery was transforming imperceptibly!

A forest without any roads. While pushing vegetation aside, they had walked roughly thirty minutes through the same forest.

That was clearly supposed to be the situation. But without them noticing, the positions, shapes and arrangements of the surrounding trees had changed greatly. Baffled, Godou wondered if they were lost.

"Hmm... The sun's direction seems different from just now."

Ena frowned and looked up into the sky.

A deciduous forest. Sunlight streamed between the leaves to produce scattering patterns of radiance, combining with the blowing wind to create a glittering world of golden brilliance—This was no longer the case.

Compared to before, the leaves and branches of the trees grew more densely, making conditions quite dim despite the daylight hours. There was no longer a cool and refreshing impression.

"We seem to have entered a totally different place."

After murmuring, Yuri suddenly began to search her rucksack.

She took out a compass. Rather than pointing north, the needle rotated slowly as if undecided over which direction was north.

"One of those so-called forests of wandering huh..."

"Not just the forest but the entire island also gives off the same feeling, Your Majesty."

Ena's predictions were completely on target.

After walking for ten-odd minutes, their location changed without their knowledge.

From forest to deep forest. From deep forest to the edge of vertical cliffs. From cliffs to a valley. Then from the bottom of a valley to a corner of the forest.

"...This time, we wandered off to quite a scenic location."

After walking for two hours or so, Godou muttered.

Advancing through the forest, they now chanced upon a small waterfall. Cool, clear water was flowing down the waterfall, pooling into a flowing stream.

Due to all the nonstop walking, Yuri with her low stamina was exhausted.

Thinking that, Godou decided to let her rest here for a while. As he turned his gaze, he found Ena gesturing to him with her eyes. The hiking expert was thinking the same thing. Godou nodded.

"Let's have a break here. It so happens that there's also water nearby."

After Godou announced, Ena approached the stream. Bringing her face close to the water surface, she sniffed its scent.

Then after she dipped a fingertip into the water and licked it with her tongue, the Hime-Miko of the Sword declared:

"Yes, this water is drinkable."

"I didn't know you could do that as well."

Godou laughed wryly but indeed it was uplifting news.

With a long journey ahead, it was uncertain how long their water would last. A refill was needed badly. Meanwhile, Ena took out an aluminum mug from her rucksack. Filling it with water, she brought it to Yuri.

The marching so far seemed like it was merely a casual stroll for the Hime-Miko. Her footsteps remained quick and nimble.

"Ah... Thank you."

Thanking Ena, Yuri gulped down the water and smiled.

This was a slightly forced smile that one would make to lessen the worries of others. Just as Godou expected, resting here was a correct decision.

"No matter what, spinning around alike this isn't making progress..."

Godou muttered and reached his hand into the stream. The refreshing coldness of the water felt rather comfortable.

Their current situation was no different from being thwarted on every front. Although battling gods had become an everyday activity for Godou, a desperate situation of this sort was something new...

Seeing Godou stare blankly at the waterfall, Yuri leaned forward.

She gazed in the direction towards where the stream flowed. Ena asked her fellow Hime-Miko:

"Did you see something, Yuri? If it's okay, tell us."

"Ah yes. I feel like the path to escaping our predicament should lie in the direction ahead."

"Speaking of which, the people who escaped the island were those who returned by sea. The direction the stream flows is towards the ocean, this does make sense in a way."

After Godou nodded, Yuri suddenly shuddered.

A white aura rose up from her body. This was the aura of psychic sensing. Following the direction of the stream's flow, the aura advanced, making its way forward, forward nonstop. Yuri nodded emphatically.

"Indeed it is so. If I apply my sensing abilities downstream, I should be able to use my power!"

Her report greatly shocked Godou. Ena immediately yelled out:

"Well done, Yuri! What do you sense right now?"

"Yes, this river converges with larger rivers and continues flowing down the mountain—finally pouring into the sea. After entering the ocean, I can use my powers freely without restriction —"

Yuri closed her eyes and concentrated as she explained.

Seas and rivers—"water" was apparently the key to breaking through this demonic realm.

Godou nodded and remembered. The island's mistress had called herself the Fire Goddess. Fire's weakness lay in water. Perhaps this might be related.

"!? Erica-san and Liliana-san are over there! They are traveling on a boat in the sea!"

Yuri called out happily. This important news interrupted Godou's pensiveness.

Part 4

Godou found out that Erica and Liliana were arriving on an engine-powered boat.

It was a fisherman's boat intended for fishing alone. It looked like they had stopped the engine and were currently drifting on the sea near the island.

In fact, Yuri was using psychic sensing to send out thought waves for conversing with them...

In this manner, Yuri's sensing powers established communications between this corner in the demonic realm and the boat out on the sea.

Continuing to keep her eyes closed, Yuri extended her slender and delicate hands into the stream. This projected images of Erica and Liliana onto the surface of the flowing water.

These were said to be the images captured visually by the Hime-Miko's psychic sensing powers.

The two Caucasian girls, one blonde and one silver-haired, were dressed in t-shirts with light jackets. Under the dazzling sunlight of the South Seas, they were surrounded by clear blue seawater.

A scene from the ocean, completely different from Godou's situation in the mountains, was projected on the stream's surface.

'After falling into the sea, we gathered up all the crew who were swimming in the water and flew back to Kota Kinabalu using Liliana's flight magic. Everyone is safe and sound.'

Erica recounted what had happened after the divine eagle appeared. Apparently they had not met any danger.

'This morning, we took a bigger fishing vessel out to sea again and returned to the island's vicinity. However, the crew were afraid of approaching the island...'

'We had the ship wait a certain distance away on standby as a mother ship.'

'Erica and I borrowed a boat and came here. We are currently investigating the island in various ways.'

Liliana entered the conversation to report on the situation. As a side note, neither of them possessed a boat license. Nevertheless, Erica had borrowed the boat using the reason 'Maybe I'll handle it. Isn't it supposed to be a piece of cake?'

Despite the engine, a boat was simply another means of transportation after all. Learning by emulating others was easy enough.

Erica appeared to be quite proficient. Oh well, since Liliana was present and able to use flight magic, there was presumably little chance of being in distress.

'I was thinking everyone must surely be alive. And it turns out just as predicted.'

"I-Ignoring the matter of my survival, do show a little worry for Mariya and Seishuuin, okay?"

Self-conscious about his own ridiculous ability to survive, Godou complained on behalf of his two female companions. Erica responded "Leaving that aside..." and began to ask about the the situation on the island.

Godou explained concisely. Then Liliana spoke up.

'This happened last night. After returning to the city of Kota Kinabalu, we tried interviewing a man who had fortunately survived and returned from the island in the past.'

During the time from last night till now, the two knights had apparently made the most of every moment.

Truly astute. As Godou listened admiringly, Erica continued:

'This is what he said. After going around in circles on the island, he became despondent. In the end, he took an inflatable boat he happened to be carrying and rowed desperately downstream. Although he had already resigned himself to death, somehow he was able to return to the ocean.'

Rafting. This was the sport of navigating white water rapids.

Attempting that kind of activity on this island was surely quite dangerous. Godou was deeply impressed.

"Escaping unscathed to the ocean huh..."

'Apparently it was thanks to his favorite hobby of competitive kayaking. In any case, it looks like we'll just have to follow the water's guidance.'

'If this goddess controls flames, then water is precisely the substance for sealing her power.'

Godou nodded in agreement with Erica and Liliana's advice.

'I have already confirmed, flight magic can only reach as far as the beach on the island. If possible, please make your way there then we should be able to instantly converge with you three.'

'Gathering everyone together is our first priority. If possible, it would be best to avoid combat.'

The above was the content of the discussion Godou had with the two knights from afar.

As the brief conversation ended, the images on the stream also disappeared.

Having focused her attention all this time, Yuri opened her eyes , turned towards Ena, who had acted as a listener throughout, and nodded.

It was off to a start again.

Following a river downhill was said to be taboo in situations of outdoor survival.

Rivers and streams flowing in mountainous terrain were particularly prone to flash floods. Were it to rain, the water volume could swell instantly, sweeping everyone into the river. Due to the looseness of the soil, there also existed the possibility of accidentally falling into the river.

Furthermore, despite being the interior of a suspicious demonic realm, this was a tropical zone after all.

One could not help but worry about the sudden arrival of fierce wind and heavy rain—localized rainstorms. The Borneo region was currently in monsoon season and sudden showers frequently occurred during the time from afternoon until night.

However, Godou and Yuri were currently accompanied by their companion Ena, the child of nature.

Trusting in the girl who was capable of sensing incoming rain by smell, they intentionally committed the taboo act with full awareness.

As if proving the correctness of the Hime-Miko's spirit powers, advancing along the flowing steam brought them to an unfamiliar location.

The group was walking on fine gravel along the side of the stream.

Stones of various sizes were scattered all over the ground. Occasionally, they had to make their way over large boulders or step into the stream, immersing themselves up to knee-level in order to advance.

Given this situation, the various levels of physical stamina in the members of the group were brought into full view.

Ena was like a fish in water. With motions as agile as a monkey, she kept moving forward.

By herself, she could probably traverse such difficult terrain effortlessly. But of course, she was not going to do that. She was mainly preoccupied with assisting her childhood friend who lacked physical stamina.

Yuri panted heavily as she climbed the boulders while Ena backed her up.

When walking in the rapids, the trio had their waists tied together by rope to prevent Yuri from slipping and getting washed away. Ena led the way.

"Oh I am truly sorry for being such a hindrance to you all..."

Yuri apologized with dejection as she made her way arduously.

Naturally, no one else thought that apart from her. No matter what, Yuri was the true guide of the group, the indispensable compass.

In fact, there were times when the shores of the river were vertical cliffs.

Unable to follow the riverbank, they were forced to take a detour, leaving the river and advancing by listening to sounds of water. However, due to the labyrinth's effects, they somehow became lost in the forest.

Just as Godou panicked, thinking they were in a bad situation...

"Please go that way."

Following the direction Yuri indicated resolutely with her finger , they were able to get back to the stream.

For Yuri's sake, Godou would stop for quick breaks from time to time. Given his physical stamina, this level of exertion was completely not a problem. He also had outdoor experience before.

In this manner, they traveled for roughly three hours.

Glancing at his watch, Godou found the time to be approaching 2pm.

Godou felt that Yuri's stamina was almost at her limits. Her eyes wandering in a daze, her footsteps were weak and unsteady. Whenever anyone spoke to her, she would be startled before attempting to respond. Seeing her forcing herself to smile was heartbreaking.

"Let's rest around here for an hour or two."

Although they had been taking breaks every once in a while, it seemed like it was time for a longer period of rest.

After Godou made his announcement, Yuri immediately showed an expression of relief.

"U-Understood... Then I shall sit down for a bit over there..."

Yuri walked unsteadily over to the shade under some trees.

But she fell down along the way. Godou and Ena immediately hurried over to help her up and laid her leaning against a tree.

She most likely collapsed from exhaustion. Resting against the tree trunk, Yuri fell asleep with audible breathing noises.

"Making you suffer so much of this hardship because of me, I'm really sorry..."

"Oh well, Yuri is enduring hardship for the sake of fulfilling Your Majesty's expectations."

While Godou apologized as he gazed at the peaceful sleeping face of the sheltered young lady, Ena commented with a smile.

This sort of answer from the Seishuuin family's eldest daughter revealed a glimpse of her true nature. Above being a modern high school girl, she was first and foremost a highborn Yamato Nadeshiko hailing from a prestigious family steeped in warrior traditions.

"But it looks like it'll take at least three days to reach the sea if we keep moving at this pace. Ena and Your Majesty can just make it, but Yuri probably can't endure to the end."

"You're right. I guess we really have to try *that* method..."

Godou paced about as he contemplated the idea.

Then he turned to look at the stream that fulfilled the role of a guideline.

In terms of caloric consumption, the idea was vastly superior to marching on land. However, the dangers involved were likely twenty times greater or more. Furthermore, they did not have the necessary equipment.

"Your Majesty is so amazing. To think you've got an idea already. What is it?"

"Yeah, didn't Erica and Liliana mention already? There was someone who used rafting to get out to sea. But if amateurs like us with no experience tried it, we'll definitely capsize along the way. Besides, without an inflatable boat or oars, we can't even attempt the challenge."

In addition, trying to build a wooden boat would require substantial skill and tools.

Precisely due to these reasons, Godou had abandoned this idea which had zero chance of realization. However, Ena began to ponder in earnest after hearing it.

"Seishuuin? This really isn't going to work. There's no need to ponder it so seriously."

"No, although there are many problems in the details... It's not impossible. So long as Ena and Yuri make the most of our spells, it should still work."

What!? Godou was greatly surprised by this unforeseen answer.

"Rather than getting cornered without any options because of worrying about risk, it's better to commit to an attempt. But as expected of Your Majesty, Ena couldn't possibly have thought up an idea like that!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword remarked cheerfully with a smile of praise.

"I'm sorry, I completely don't understand what part of my idea is worthy of your praise."

"No no, Ena always shows admiration for anyone who could come up with even more ridiculous ideas. Besides, Your Majesty is a person who not only has ideas but also puts them into action."

"Now that you put it this way, I don't feel like I'm being praised. .."

With a subtle feeling, Godou put down his rucksack and began to rummage through his luggage.

Yuri would probably want to have some light snacks once she woke up. Godou readied his equipment in preparation for that.

On the other hand, Ena made a childish expression as if about to engage in mischief.

Taking a knife, she slowly cut down branches from the trees growing on the riverbank. Then gathering the fallen branches, she took out various tools from her rucksack.

"~~~~~~♪"

Ena hummed as she engrossed herself in the unknown task.

Finishing preparations for outdoor cooking (which was not much to speak of), Godou waited leisurely for Yuri to wake up and Ena to finish her task.

Forty minutes passed. With great satisfaction, Ena placed the finished object into her pocket.

A little while after that, Yuri woke up and began to survey the riverbank surroundings with a sleepy gaze.

Godou got ready.

Ena took out a bottle of natural stream water on which the words "wonderfully delicious" were written on it. The water was poured into a stainless steel pot they were carrying. Then Godou took out a small-sized gas stove to boil it.

Once the water boiled in the pot, some of it was poured into three aluminum mugs.

Then instant coffee and sugar from stick-shaped sachets were added and stirred. The sugar portion was especially generous.

After that, Godou added bag-packaged instant noodles to the boiling water in the pot.

While waiting for the noodles to cook, Godou called Yuri and Ena over.

"Fufu. This is so sweet and very tasty too."

Scalded slightly by the temperature of the aluminum mug's brim, Yuri was drinking her coffee in a cherishing manner.

She smiled radiantly. In actual fact, people would find sugar particularly tasty after exhausting themselves on a long walk. This was due to the body's desire for energy replenishment.

"Say, Seishuuin, what were you doing just now?"

"Hmm, something I made just in case. I'll explain later."

Seeing Ena busy eating her noodles, Godou decided to pursue the matter later.

He was quite hungry too. Godou wolfed down the noodles together with the salty broth. On the other hand, Yuri was gracefully eating her noodles with a satisfied expression.

Renourished, the trio cleared up efficiently.

Godou still had no intention of setting off immediately. Although they needed to hurry on their way, it would be placing the cart before the horse if this caused Yuri to collapse again. Let's rest a little while longer—Godou thought to himself.

However, before he could give voice to his thoughts, he suddenly sensed the approach of a situation that rendered his sentence moot.

A great noise was heard. It was the type of noise produced from trees falling over left and right, trampled by the approach of some kind of gigantic entity.

Ena stood up and gathered her concentration, directing her focused gaze towards the noise.

Surprised, Yuri also did the same as her fellow miko.

Then the figure entered Godou's field of vision.

A giant, roughly fourteen or fifteen meters tall. Musclebound all over. Since all he wore was a loincloth, his extraordinarily developed muscles were clear to see.

And he was one-eyed. Instead of two eyeballs, he only possessed one.

A one-eyed giant. According to Greek mythology, this would be a cyclops. Appearing before Godou's group was a new minion of the goddess.

Part 5

The cyclops looked down at Godou's trio from above, making a violent snort.

He seemed quite excited. It would come as no surprise if he suddenly attacked. Responding to Ena's consent-seeking gaze, Godou passed Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's usage rights to her .

Then the jet-black divine blade suddenly manifested in the hand of the Hime-Miko of the Sword in a display of steel might.

As Ena prepared to approach and attack the cyclops in one fell swoop, Godou gestured to her to stand down.

There was not much point in skirmishing here against an enemy of merely divine beast class. The mastermind was somewhere else. Godou looked towards the expansive sky behind the cyclops.

"In any case, you must be watching this! Stop sending these subordinates and come down yourself!"

Godou called out to the goddess who should be somewhere behind her minion's back.

The response came instantly. Dazzling light descended from the sky, glittering as brilliantly as sunlight reflecting off the surface of water. Countless lights gathered together.

This dazzling brightness swirled in a vortex resembling a galaxy and descended next to the cyclops.

'Fufufufu. I cannot but answer your summons, my dear. My most beloved god-slayer!'

The goddess' voice came from the vortex of light floating in midair.

Godou could feel his body and mind overflowing with combat power and rising emotion. Although she still concealed her appearance, her true body was definitely present. Then a familiar cawing was heard.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!

The divine eagle flew from the distant sky. The wounds Ena inflicted seemed to have healed completely.

With the divine eagle gathered with the cyclops, the opposing side's formation was ready.

"What the heck do you mean by 'most beloved'... You won't even talk to me face to face."

'We can casually enjoy that kind of activity later.'

The goddess replied to Godou's grumbling in an inexplicably adorable tone of voice.

'Ufufu. In my view, a man must first possess a strong body and heroic mettle in order to become mine. My dear, by my eyes of a goddess', I can tell you are my type of man. How about it, accept these loving feelings and agree to my invitation, yes?'

"What invitation? Is it going to be... Twisting my arms and legs off again, right?"

Despite the annoyance Godou was feeling, he still continued to converse:

"If you plan to take me by force, we'll simply have to resist. But I don't really want to engage in violence. Why don't you give up on me and continue living your life quietly?"

As a believer in pacifism, Godou tried his best to propose calmly.

However, the goddess in her vortex of light form did not answer. Instead she seemed to be giving off an impression as though she was smiling "fufufufu..." Godou sighed.

Just as Amakasu pointed out, this goddess really did seem to have stalker characteristics.

In that case, Godou had no choice but to respond accordingly. He first asked:

"Who made this island? Was it you or Alexandre Gascoigne?"

'Ah, what a truly nostalgic name. Speaking of which, he is also a god-slayer of the present generation. Fufufufu, so it turns out that you two know each other!'

A correct guess. Godou had mentioned Alec's name simply as a test, but it turned out to be right on target.

Having gotten a lead, Godou nodded. But then the goddess' next words caused him to go "Eh?" in great surprise.

'Just as you suggested, this island is something I created to reminisce the age of myths, using the divine artifact given to me by him—His Highness Alexandre, as proof of love. This isolated island, as a goddess' territory, shall become the love nest for Kusanagi-sama and I!'

"P-Proof of love!?"

"Given by Prince Alec!?"

Yuri and Ena were simultaneously dumbstruck by the shocking news.

However, the goddess did not elaborate further on this topic. Instead, her dazzling brightness intensified compared to before.

In response to the light, the divine eagle suddenly cried out.

SQUAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAWK!!

Even the cyclops began to yell sonorously in accord.

UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

The savage divine minion stomped his feet. He seemed like he was all to eager to start "twisting off" Godou's arms and legs. In that case, the appropriate choice would be—

"For victory, hasten forth before me... O Immortal Sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion!"

Pulling out a trump card suddenly, Godou invoked his greatest firepower, the [White Stallion].

This Fire Goddess had apparently caused all sorts of commotions over the past few years. This was enough to satisfy the condition of "a great sinner who had caused suffering to the people."

Obtaining victory in this manner would be best. Even if the enemy was not defeated, at least a certain matter could be confirmed—

Believing thus, Godou summoned a second sun into the eastern sky from where spears of white light were released to descend upon the earth. Godou intended to engulf the vortex of light that stood as the goddess' incarnation.

'O light of dawn, offer up to me the shield of gold!'

However, the goddess chanted spell words as if operating under pre-established harmony.[19]

As her facade, the vortex of light spread itself out like a canopy to block the [White Stallion].

In the past, Marquis Voban had used the sun god Apollo's authority to devour these flames. This time, they were absorbed by the goddess' glittering radiance!

"An existence capable of devouring light must necessarily harbor light within as well, I see..."

Godou recalled Yuri's oracle from the past.

Just as he thought, this Fire Goddess was also a sun deity. Godou turned his gaze towards the Hime-Miko beside him. However, Yuri shook her head with a sad expression.

She was still unable to discern the goddess' true identity.

This meant they could not rely on the [Sword]. Without that weapon, fighting an enemy in command of a myriad of divine powers would be quite challenging...

"Your Majesty. Let's take Erica-san's advice and make a run for it as soon as we find an opportunity."

Godou nodded in agreement with Ena's suggestion.

Having finished shooting flames, the sun in the eastern sky disappeared. In its place, the divine eagle attacked from the sky while the cyclops on the ground raised his fist to pummel Godou!

Ena instantly sprang into action. Performing a horizontal sweep with her partner of steel, she called out.

"Night descends with pitch-black darkness at Makimuku's... Rising sounds of the river herald a raging storm."[20]

A storm's spell words. With Susanoo's spiritual presence residing in the Hime-Miko's body, divine possession was invoked.

Instantly transformed into a heaven-sent child of the winds, Ena raised Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high and swung, releasing a slicing vacuum from the jet-black blade. Her target was naturally the incoming divine eagle in flight.

Exhibiting its superb flying skills, the divine eagle evaded the vacuum blade by ascending with breathtaking speed.

However, Ena swung Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in response. The vacuum blade instantly changed its trajectory to pursue the escaped divine eagle.

Ena was employing a flying projectile for the purpose of severing the enemy's wings.

Meanwhile, the cyclops' fist descended like an iron hammer—

Godou blocked with both arms. Naturally, he was using the incarnation of the [Bull]. Since his opponent was the one-eyed giant, he might as well use the incarnation of peerless might.

"Daaaaah!"

Godou grabbed the cyclops' fist and swung hard.

Employing the same principle as used in the track and field event of hammer throwing, 180cm tall Godou was able to launch the 15m cyclops into the air.

It was truly ridiculous to the extreme.

With a shocked expression, the one-eyed giant fell among the trees in the forest. Naturally, this could not have inflicted a critical injury. Nevertheless, it bought time for Godou to summon his next source of battle power.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

After an interval of mere days, he summoned the [Boar] again.

Within the blink of an eye, the pitch black flames manifesting in midair transformed into a beast and descended on the ground.

This time, there were two targets—the cyclops and the divine eagle. Although this was supposed to be a troublesome task, the [Boar] seemed delighted instead and cried out with joy.

oooooooooooooooooooooooo.....

This was the new power Godou had learned about not too long ago. The preparation prior to releasing super shockwaves.

This groaning was about to turn into the most powerful artillery . Immediately...

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAA
!

Like last time, the [Boar] suddenly released a shockwave from its mouth.

The shockwave blew away the stately body of the divine eagle.

Godou had learned his lesson from last time. The flying king of birds was a troublesome enemy capable of taking a "firebird" form. By focusing on defeating it first, he could then handle the enemies on the ground.

Thus he ordered the [Boar] to roar heartily and release a great shockwave.

Even the divine eagle was unable to evade. Blown away by a direct hit, it crumbled into dust and disappeared.

Nevertheless, the cyclops stood up once again during this time.

The one-eyed giant raised its arm towards the sky. Next, dark clouds gathered densely in the sky and released lightning. The zigzagging lighting struck the [Boar]'s gigantic body.

ROOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar] howled in pain. However, Ena had already started running while this was happening.

Running swiftly like a wolf, she swiftly took care of the cyclops, landing a slice on his right shin. A full powered cut performed with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Even the one-eyed giant was unable to endure such an attack and fell backwards.

Ena sliced again. This time, she aimed at the left shin.

The [Boar] charged mercilessly at the unbalanced enemy whose legs were both injured by slicing wounds.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR
!

Ramming at full power with its head, the [Boar] stabbed its two tusks, sharp as swords, into the enemy's belly. Then withdrawing its tusks, it slammed with its body again.

The cyclops was sent flying like a rag.

Lying on the ground, the giant was on his last breath. Landing a decisive blow at this moment was probably no challenge at all.

However, Godou suddenly realized with surprise. Compared to the battle at Kimigahama, the divine eagle and giant were rather fragile. Last time, the Fire Goddess had clearly injected power into her minions to power them up.

Why did she not do so this time?

'Indeed you are ferocious and brave... Now that is the hero worthy of my attentions, Kusanagi-sama!'

Hovering in the sky, the vortex of light murmured.

The princess goddess' voice seemed to be filled with absolute confidence and calm. Godou began to tremble without reason. His Campione instincts had sensed danger and was warning him!

'In that case, I shall not be stingy. Come, you girls, demons of the wind! Hum for the terrifying Devil King the song held in reserve, one he cannot hear!'

A song of spell words. Godou instantly raised his magical power.

If the enemy was using magic, he should raise his magical power as high as he could to deflect it. This was a technique commonly seen in battles between gods and god-slayers.

In one breath, Godou heightened in his body the magical power belonging to a Campione.

Everything was all set—That was what one would normally expect. Nevertheless, Godou had a strange feeling, as if some " foreign body" had entered his body...?

'Fufufu. Faced against a god-slayer accustomed to battle, quite a lot of spells cannot take much of an effect. Hence I used the blowing wind to carry a spell in an attempt to send it into your body's interior. Rather successfully, apparently.'

Did the goddess achieve a similar effect as what normally required oral intake!?

Godou was greatly shocked. Had he known about this, he surely would have tried to resist. But now it was too late. Much too late.

What kind of spell had been cast on his body—?

Trembling, Godou saw a change occurring before his eyes. A great many geometric patterns appeared in the sky, tracing out a glowing magic circle. Then the goddess chanted:

'Come. Before a beautiful goddess, sharp swords are unnecessary, are they not? Violent spears and arrows for shooting prey are likewise useless. Shed your armor, throw down your shield, come to my side!'

Instantly, the [Boar] disappeared from Godou's sight. In its stead, a stylized [Boar] emblem manifested in the magic circle in the sky.

"...Stolen, huh?"

Godou muttered in shock as he gradually understood.

The spell just now had stolen Verethragna's incarnation. He attempted to transmit commands to the [Boar] but there was no response. He could no longer feel the divine beast's existence at all!

'O great and valiant hero, hurry over to my side!'

The goddess proceeded to chant further.

Godou could sense something else being taken from within his body. Immediately, the magic circle in the sky displayed emblems of a horse and a bull. The [White Stallion] and the [Bull] were also taken.

"Godou-san! If this continues, all the incarnations will be stolen!
"

Yuri suddenly yelled out beside him, her face full of worry.

"Please try your hardest to resist the goddess' spell! Hurry!"

This urgent command was completely unlike the gentle Yamato Nadeshiko.

Nevertheless, this was due to the current desperate situation. Godou raised his magical power again.

Silently, he recited Verethagna's scripture in his mind with great force. I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands. Man and devil, all enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished!

Singlemindedly focused on defeating the foreign object in his body, he concentrated his thoughts on breaking the goddess' spell.

However, during this time—

More emblems continued to appear in the magic circle.

The patterns swirled like a tornado. Next were the goat, the ram , the raptor—Defeat was imminent if this continued!

"Damn it. Is everything going to be stolen!?"

Yelling from the bottom of his lungs, Godou summoned all his magical power to drive out the invisible enemy.

Then Godou finally sensed the disappearance of the rampant magic within his body.

"Of the ten incarnations... Only three remain, huh."

Seven emblems were glowing in the magic circle in the sky.

Left within Godou's body were the three incarnations of the [Camel], the [Youth] and the [Warrior]. All the rest had been stolen.

"She possesses the power to capture heroes and enslave them. Being a glorious hero god, Verethragna has been ensnared by her powerful qualities as a femme fatale..."

"What a troublesome ability to handle..."

Hearing Yuri's oracle, Ena muttered in shock.

Her reaction was perfectly reasonable. Faced with a completely unforeseen attack, even Godou was completely stunned.

'Fufufufu. Kusanagi-sama, you should give up. Be my captive—this implies becoming a goddess' lover, you know? Let us get along in harmony to enjoy eternal love? Cultivating romance between a goddess and a god-slayer should prove to be most amusing!'

Godou's only remaining weapons were Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and three incarnations.

But in the current situation, both the [Youth] and the [Warrior] could not be used. Godou was also highly doubtful of the [Camel]' s usefulness in dealing with a goddess who used magic.

Godou felt himself being cornered into desperation.

'Come, Kusanagi-sama. Please come to my side.'

Up until this point, the goddess had taken the form of a swirling vortex of light.

This glittering brilliance changed in form to take on human appearance. A woman's silhouette as slender as a juniper. Then her height expanded to roughly five meters.

Reaching out with her slender arms, she intended to capture him.

Damn it! I can't just do nothing to resist!? A savage grin appeared on Godou's face involuntarily. Just as he prepared to struggle to the bitter end—

"I won't let you have His Majesty! Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!"

With a vigorous yell, the Hime-Miko of the Sword swung Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in a slash.

Infused with Susanoo's divine presence, the divine sword severed the goddess' arm at the elbow!

'Kyaaaaaaaaaah!'

The goddess screamed, causing Godou to jump in surprise.

The goddess' silhouette form dissipated and reformed as the vortex of light. Rising up into the gray sky covered by dense thunderclouds, it seemed like she was fleeing from Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

To think the sword slash just now could display such might against a [Heretic God]—

As Godou was overcome with surprise, the vortex of light entered the cluster of thunderclouds.

Next, the dark clouds covering the sky kept releasing lightning and started to attack their location.

Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!

Every time lightning struck the ground, rumbling thunder was produced with great impact.

While avoiding this place, the goddess seemed to be firing off lightning strikes nonstop. Thunder rumbled continuously without pause.

The lightning had yet to strike the trio of Godou, Yuri and Ena. However, it was going to happen sooner or later.

If they continued to stay here, they would probably be burnt to a crisp by lightning in a matter of minutes. Just at this moment—

"Your Majesty... The thing mentioned earlier is already prepared. Ena is ready any time you want."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword murmured softly.

The thing mentioned earlier, could it be that!? Godou looked at the stream and turned his gaze back at Ena. She responded with a fearless smile. They were really going to do that!?

Godou could barely contain his surprise but he nodded deeply at the same time.

Indeed, that was the only way to seek an escape route. He instantly made his decision. Since Ena said it could be done, he would trust in and leave things to her. However—

Kusanagi Godou had one more companion. What about her?

"...Mariya. I have a very ridiculous idea. I am very sorry for asking you to accompany me in my recklessness, but could you please accompany me?"

Godou called out as he watched the stream.

Yuri went "Eh?" with surprise and followed Godou's gaze. Then she turned to look at her childhood friend Ena's expression, only to see her gazing at the flowing stream. Apparently garnering an understanding of what everything meant, Yuri's expression stiffened.

But then her expression change immediately. With a dignified expression worthy of her "Hime" title, Yuri nodded as she leaned close to Godou and spoke:

"I am coming too. Godou-san, please take me along!"

"Yuri, accompanied by the two of us, His Majesty must be sent to a safe place. Naturally, we will stay together till the very end. Are you ready?"

Ena also came to Godou's side. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had already disappeard from her hand, returning to within Godou's body.

Yuri nodded with a resolute expression in response to her childhood friend's inquiry.

"Great. As soon as Ena uses the spell, we'll all ride on it. Then just keep casting all the protective, disaster warding and anti-drowning spells you can think of and we'll be fine!"

As the Hime-Miko yelled, thunder rumbled overhead.

Using this as an impromptu signal, the trio of Godou, Yuri and Ena all jumped into the stream—

Chapter 5 - Black Blade, Hitherto Unawakened

Part 1

Directed by the goddess, lightning descended from the thunderclouds.

Godou, Yuri and Ena had jumped into the stream together. They did not mind immersing themselves up to their knees. After all, they were going to get completely wet later.

"Take this, Yuri. For tying everyone together!"

Ena tossed a ball of red thread to her fellow Hime-Miko.

It looked like the type of thread used for sewing. Yuri apparently knew how to use it already. Simply replying "Very well !", she caught the ball of thread.

Next, Ena took out a small wooden toy.

Simply stated, it was a mini-sized "raft." Ten-odd wooden rods had been cut down to the same dimensions and bound together with string.

Placing this "raft" on her forehead, Ena chanted spell words.

"The one who effects wondrous change shall enact a miracle."

Then with a cry of "Ei!" she tossed the "raft" into the stream.

The palm-sized "raft" expanded in size as it fell into the water, transforming unbelievably into a real raft. Godou realized at this time.

This was the Japanese version of the magic Erica used to transform her beloved sword.

"Because Ena already performed a secret 'rite' on this thing, it should be quite reliable. It is much sturdier than normal rafts built from wood!"

The make-shift raft created using wizardry was a square roughly three meters long. Explaining, its maker was the first person to sit down on it. Godou and Yuri immediately followed.

The make-shift raft started to move along with the stream.

Whitewater rafting by inexperienced amateurs. A terrifying challenge was about to begin.

—Wooooooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaaah!

Godou and the girls screamed as they clung onto the raft.

The one-eyed giant—the cyclops. After being blown away by the [Boar], this monster had stumbled and crawled his way to the stream, reaching out with his massive arm.

Nevertheless, the giant on his last breath exhausted all his strength at this time and collapsed into dust.

But just as the trio breathed a sigh of relief, the goddess' voice was heard from the sky.

'Are you going to flee as well, Kusanagi-sama!? Indeed, speaking of the various god-slayers of the current generation, they are all great indomitable heroes who flee with such alacrity as though they had wings!'

Her words were filled with sarcastic laughter. Furthermore...

'Nevertheless, I will never give up on you, Kusanagi-sama! Fufu , I shall prepare a new assassin to replace the slain minions. Flee as much as you like. So long as I live, the day of your sucessful escape from this island shall never arrive!'

She was issuing a warning. However, the goddess did not seem like she intended to pursue personally.

Was she taking precautions because she was cut by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi?

In any case, getting far away from the goddess as quickly as possible was a good thing.

By the time Godou turned his attention back to his surroundings, the sound of thunder was already quite distant. Thanks to riding the flow of the stream, they had now left behind the Fire Goddess hidden in the thunderclouds.

However, the make-shift raft was not comfortable at all.

Due to following raging rapids, the feeling was naturally akin to a rodeo. The raft kept jumping up at times while sinking into the water on other occasions. The up and down feeling was quite frightening.

"By the way, you mentioned some kind of 'rite' just now. What is that?"

Godou yelled while being shaken violently.

Although it was a model handcrafted by Ena, this raft give off a feeling as if it were made of antique timber. Why?

"Uh, it's that thing. Amakasu mentioned it before. Using popular terminology, I guess you could call it a *shikigami* spirit. Because this [Rite] was passed down in the Seishuuin family and used over the generations, it's quite effective!"

"Ah yeah, that thing you see in television and movies!"

Called onmyoudou or onmyouji.[21] Godou recalled the relevant knowledge.

It seemed to be something quite unexpectedly valuable. But sitting here without seat belts, one could easily fall off at any time. The trio hung on desperately with both hands as they sat on the wooden raft. As they stayed in this state, a short while passed—

"O Kukuri no Himegami, I beseech you to watch over these skills of thread spinning and tying!"

Yuri chanted spell words presently.

She seemed to be concentrating her thoughts into the ball of thread she was clutching tightly in her hand.

"Everyone, please lie down!"

Godou and Ena did as she instructed. Yuri also laid herself face down on the raft.

Then the thread she was clutching began to move on its own. Like spider's silk, it flew out of the Hime-Miko's hand!

The thread wrapped itself around the raft, layer after layer.

Godou, Yuri and Ena looked as though they were tied up face down as they lay on the raft. In any case, using the raft as a base, the three of them were bound together by thread.

The thread wrapped around them repeatedly for ten-odd layers , binding Godou and the girls securely.

Godou sensed magical power from the thread. This was probably no mere sewing equipment but a real wizardry apparatus.

"This thread is strong enough to withstand cuts from bladed weapons. Except for special circumstances, it will not break at all!"

In other words, this thread was as strong as metal wires.

Nevertheless, this did not change the fact that they were engaged in a life-threatening event.

The raft continued to rise up and down on the water surface due to the impact of the rapid currents.

Water splashed into their faces repeatedly and the raft dipped many times underwater. Even when it floated back to the surface, they did not get that feeling of salvation from death. The possibility of drowning crossed everyone's mind.

With such momentum and speed, the raft kept colliding into certain objects as the water currents pushed forward—

Ena had said "much sturdier than normal," but how sturdy was it exactly? There would be collisions with rocks as well as driftwood, right?

Dangerous elements were innumerable if one tried to count them all. This was the current situation.

During this time of danger, the two Hime-Miko by Godou's side performed spells to their best ability.

"O Great God of Arms! Hasten forth to welcome our arrival at this land of the rising sun!"

"O Sai no Kami, please grant us your mercy and bless us along the road ahead!"

Ena prayed to the guardian deity of warriors while Yuri pleaded to the guardian deity of travelers for protection.

The Hime-Miko had been praying nonstop all this time. This was probably what Ena had meant when she said to "keep casting all the protective, disaster warding and anti-drowning spells you can think of."

Since things have come to this, all Kusanagi Godou could do was believe in them.

That said, faced with dangers he was powerless against, Godou could feel nothing but fright. Compared to a battle against gods, he lamented with even greater feeling—

"I-I almost thought I was a goner..."

"S-Same here. To be honest, I was thinking I would never live to step foot on Japanese soil again..."

"Oh my... How intense... In all sorts of ways..."

Godou, Yuri and Ena finally relaxed and muttered.

Counting from the time they started the deadly voyage, an hour had already passed.

The raft the trio was riding managed to survive. Along the way, the current brought them into collisions with hard rocks many times. Every single time, there was nothing they could do but pray

to the heavens. There were also several times when the raft endured impacts with hard objects with a loud "crash."

In the end, they capsized roughly three times (although miraculously, the raft righted itself every time).

In spite of all that, this raft that barely counted as a boat still endured, transporting the trio to this place.

Fortunately, there were no waterfalls along the way. The water current pushing the raft was quite gentle now. This was because they had left the mountains and finally reached flat lowlands.

Seeing that it was safe, Yuri had released the thread of wizardry a short while ago.

Although they were completely drenched, the trio could at least relax and rest on the raft after what seemed like eternity.

"By the way, your anti-drowning spells were really effective, Mariya and Seishuuin."

Godou thanked them sincerely from the bottom of his heart.

Although their prayers did not show visible effects, he could not attribute the safe outcome of their reckless rafting to any other reason.

"Yes. It seems like there were more benefits than expected."

"To think you would say 'it seems like'... Didn't you guarantee it was going to succeed with full confidence?"

Godou smiled wryly in response to Ena's exclamation.

However, he noticed Yuri making an expression as if she wanted to say something.

"Oh dear, those spells do not have 'visible effects on use' after all . They feel more like invisible protection."

"Y-Yes. Which is why we were able to arrive here safe and sound. What a relief."

"It probably wouldn't have worked if Ena was alone. But since Yuri is such a good girl, Ena believed she would surely find a way to overcome all difficulties."

"Ena-san, please do not rely excessively on these spells in those kinds of situations..."

I see. So that method of escape was actually beyond Ena's expectations, huh?

Godou was utterly shocked. This brave attempt at rafting was perhaps an exceptionally risky gamble. That said, the fact of the matter was they were saved as a result. After all, being carried by the water current like this eliminated the need to walk, thus reducing Yuri's burden greatly.

"So long as we ended up alright, I guess I shouldn't fuss over it.. ."

Godou sighed as he spoke. Oh well, they were safe anyway.

While the leader exhibited his natural easygoing personality, the voyage continued without incident.

The one rowing was Ena who had somehow brought out an oar and was casually charting their course. Despite lacking prior rafting experience, she seemed quite used to using this type of oar.

From the raft they could observe tropical rainforest scenery on the riverbank, quite different compared to the mountainous view in the mountains. The temperature was also much higher, prompting Godou and the girls to take off their jackets.

A tropical zone. The land of constant summer heat again.

The clothes drenched from raftting should air dry rather quickly .

Soon after, the salty smell of the sea drifted across the river surface, announcing the ocean's approach.

The trio looked at one another, recalling a particular warning. So long as the goddess is alive, Kusanagi Godou was absolutely unable to escape the island. So, what exactly was going to happen —?

Before boarding the raft, the trio had abandoned their burdensome rucksacks.

Currently, they were only carrying minimal possessions such as water bottles. Also, everyone should be quite tired from the rowdy farce that lasted until now. Godou particularly wanted Yuri to have a rest.

Calculating thus, Godou decided to make a rest stop nearby and regroup.

As the sun set, the second night arrived on the island in the demonic realm.

The trio of Godou, Yuri and Ena was currently on a beach by the seashore. Everyone was gazing towards the ocean beneath the night sky. Soon after, a boat sped across the sea to enter the cove that served as the entrance to the island.

The engine-powered boat advanced nimbly, arriving at the beach where Godou's group was waiting.

"Thank you for waiting patiently."

"The important thing is that everyone is safe and sound!"

The new arrivals at the beach were Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar.

After reaching the beach, Yuri's psychic sensing could be used freely. They had contacted the knights and decided to meet up tonight here. Instead of flight magic, the knights traveled by boat in order to bring provisions such as food and water.

But after a brief delightful reunion, they sat in a circle to hold a serious conference.

Due to illumination by the moon and the stars, there was no need to use flashlights.

"Reaching the seashore is a good thing, but I'm positive making an exit won't be so easy for me."

Godou spoke with resignation.

"However, it's different for everyone else—"

"Are you asking the four of us to depart from the island, leaving behind Kusanagi Godou alone?"

"How utterly inane. On the contrary, this is the only point that is a little fresh. But you couldn't really be considering that, Godou? "

Liliana and Erica glared with reprimanding gazes.

Well, I expected this sort of reaction. Godou shrugged and stopped what he was going to say.

Hence, Yuri spoke up instead.

"The labyrinthine magical effects that fills this island... I believe it is indeed Prince Alec's authority. After hearing His Highness' name mentioned by the goddess, I saw the same god's sacred name that I once saw at the floating island."

"Cretan civilization's divine king, Minos huh? A deity of the earth with connections to Poseidon."

Liliana nodded.

"Yes. The authority Prince Alec used before... I believe the goddess is likely sustaining it through some sort of magic."

"How terrible. So what extent of divine magic does this goddess possess?"

As Ena grumbled about the enemy's myriad magical powers, Erica interjected:

"A witch enslaving heroes as well as a sun deity... Although I can think of several names, jumping to conclusions at this juncture seems too dangerous. The issue of the 'Pan-Eurasian hero' also needs to be resolved."

"A witch related to a hero from some country huh? No idea."

"Let's either wait for more decisive clues or when Yuri receives a spirit vision. Right now, we're a little short on both."

Erica and Ena nodded to each other. On the side, Liliana lamented with chagrin:

"Furthermore, to think Verethragna's incarnations would be stolen... Kusanagi Godou, please be careful. The reduction of available combat potential is a huge problem—"

"Hmm?"

"Now that you have lost the [Ram], this means that you cannot revive as usual when suffering from fatal injuries."

"True, but being excessively cautious isn't good either."

Although he nodded to acknowledge the blue knight's advice, Godou replied:

"If one falters in the face of a god, the already miniscule chance of victory shrinks further into nothingness. Oh well, I just have to go all out with what I have. Furthermore—"

Suddenly remembering, Godou looked at his right arm. His " partner" was still available and ready.

"I still have Ama no Murakumo. Although as a weapon, it's not that easy to use."

This was not complaining or grumbling but simply what Godou thought.

He did not think he could use Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi effectively as a weapon. Perhaps this was just as well, since swords were such dangerous existences.

Oh well, if the divine sword wanted to go on a rampage, it was probably going to be disappointed.

"Your Majesty, Ena will work hard too. Because Ama no Murakumo is Ena and Your Majesty's partner."

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's real user stated.

Perhaps Ena had already secretly heard the grumblings of this " partner."

Imagining this to himself, Godou went "I'm sorry" to apologize.

The situation was a bit—no, it was quite pessimistic. But in spite of all that, so long as there is a will, there should be a way... Godou resolved himself in this manner.

Part 2

After the reunion and the conference ended, the team set up their tents to camp for the night.

The tents were part of the equipment Erica and Liliana transported with the boat. Just like last night, they were going to rotate in shifts and have one person keeping watch while the others slept. As before, morning arrived without incident.

Godou finished breakfast and was feeling tense in anticipation of the upcoming battle against the goddess today—

But the current situation was not especially tense. In fact, one could say it was the opposite.

A tropical zone's dazzling sunlight. The weather today was exceptionally sunny.

A white beach. Completely free from pollution, this demonic realm's beach was truly pure and pristine. Beautiful beyond compare.

There was the ocean as well. Facing this South Seas region of constant summer was a clear, bottomless, emerald-green ocean.

Gathered here were girls in swimsuits, displaying their figures with freedom and delight...

"No. Going swimming in this kind of situation, what on earth are they thinking?"

Godou reproached calmly.

The sight before him consisted of attractive maidenly figures that made him embarrassed to stare directly.

But in this case, the situation was already developed. With common sense, full presence of mind and the spirit of critical appraisal, Godou turned his indifferent gaze towards the girls' gorgeous appearances.

First was Erica. Godou originally expected her to wear a red swimsuit as usual, but that was not the case.

Instead, it was a white bikini. Nevertheless, the two colors representing the association she belonged to—red and black—were used to line the edges of her swimsuit as decoration. This style of swimsuit, self-assertively emphasizing her proportions to an excessive degree, was on the other hand—

Quite usual of her.

Then there was Liliana, who adhered to her usual color by wearing a blue bikini with a black pareo wrapped around her waist. Untying the pareo, her astoundingly slim figure and slender limbs exhibited charm akin to that of a professional beach volleyball player.

Yuri was also dressed in a bikini-style outfit.

Her swimsuit's elegance and pink material were quite suited to her. According to Godou's memory, Yuri only wore one-piece swimsuits in the past. She was actually not very comfortable dressed like this, right? Looking quite embarrassed, Yuri attempted to hide behind the other girls.

But it was impossible to hide. Despite Yuri's slender physique, her bust and posterior regions were rich with a curvaceous sense of fullness, clearly visible due to wearing a bikini.

Finally there was Ena.

Just as expected, she was wearing a bikini.

However, its two-piece design had an especially adult flavor.

Although Ena's personality was cheerful and innocent, her figure rivaled Erica in splendor. Furthermore, her waist-length black hair was full of luster. Standing on the beach dressed in a black bikini like this, she gave off an incredible sense of maturity as well as the charm of a mysterious young beauty.

Equally beautiful. This was a blooming display of attractive young women.

"We're about to fight a deity. Why are you girls dressed like that ?"

"Godou, your way of thinking is too shallow."

The one who rebuffed his common sense commentary was naturally Erica.

"Indeed, the battle is imminent. However, we still don't know when it'll begin, right?"

Godou frowned at what she pointed out.

She was right. The goddess' abilities were powerful and varied. In any case, surely she already knew her quarry was at the beach since yesterday. But yet she had not made any appearance.

Was she planning on preventing them from going out to sea, to instill a sense of despair?

Or perhaps, banking on her advantage of being able to strike at any time, she intended to let the hunted prey, Godou, fall into anxiety and unease?

"It is not a good thing to wait nervously for an enemy whose arrival time is uncertain. You'll just get all worked up for nothing. Rather, wouldn't it be better to relax without compromising alertness excessively? Also, this is preparation."

"I don't understand that logic... But anyway, why a swim in the ocean?"

"Because we were going to be walking around the island, sufficient swimwear was prepared beforehand for everyone. Since we brought them here already, it'd be a waste not to use them. Also, isn't this simply more fun?"

So this was the argument Erica used to convince the girls.

Turning his gaze, Godou found Yuri going "Seriously, Erica-san , this again..." with a troubled expression, but the honors student did not seem like she was going to voice her objections.

Liliana also went "well, this is also battle experience" and simply stood back with a sour look. One could ridicule the fact of her preparedness in casually bringing a lifebuoy.

Speaking of Ena, she was smiling with her usual attitude.

"Yes yes. Even if we waited with discipline akin to staying awake all night in a besieged situation, nothing good would come out of it."

Oh well, perhaps they really were right.

Godou nodded and Erica smiled tenderly as she tossed male swimwear over to him.

After changing behind a rock, Godou found the four girls frolicking in the seawater, their playful laughter greatly adding to the beach atmosphere.

To avoid exhaustion, he probably should not swim too strenuously.

"Your Majesty, please come over here for a while!"

Just as Godou was about to enter the water for a light swim, Ena called him.

"Oh my, since Your Majesty is in a position of waiting for the enemy to arrive at this encampment, Ena thinks Your Majesty should make a display of solemn dignity. Yeah, something that feels suited to a king's position."

"Say, Seishuuin, I don't think sea bathing has anything to do with position."

"Okay okay. Come, let's sit here for a bit."

Invited to a patch of cool sand next to the sea, Godou did as he was told.

As Godou puzzled over Ena's intentions, the Hime-Miko of the sword swiftly took a seat by his left. Then she pressed her body close to him, leaning with all her weight!

The tender supple sensation caused Godou to shudder in surprise.

But unlike Erica, this did not convey the kind of alarming feeling as if the posture would progress into something even more intimate. Perhaps this was actually what made Ena so perfect?

"W-What are you doing!?"

"Ena saw this in a foreign teledrama once. Like a mafia boss guy sitting by the poolside with two ladies waiting on him, drinking cocktails. Your Majesty should do that too. Yuri, come over for a while!"

Ena called to her childhood friend who was a short distance away. Over there, Liliana was floating casually in the water, sitting on a lifebuoy that served as a piece of the boat's lifesaving equipment. Yuri was also wearing a lifebuoy and the two girls seemed to be playing together happily.

Called by Ena, Yuri turned her head to look and hence discovered the situation.

"W-What are you two doing over there!?"

"Fufu, you should hurry over here, Yuri. The two of us will play the roles of His Majesty's lovers together."

"You two, please do not engage in this type of behavior during the daytime, especially outdoors."

"Guh... What a situation of utter depravity! Even Kusanagi Godou could not possibly do that!"

"It's not like that, Mariya and Liliana! Seishuuin decided this all on her own—"

"I-In that case, Godou-san, you should hurry and separate from her."

"O-Oh yeah."

Conditioned by past scenes of being held captive in Erica's forceful grip, Godou had forgotten that Ena did not possess the same kind of monstrous strength. Godou immediately stood up, forcibly struggling free from the Hime-Miko's body.

However, someone else immediately pounced on him from somewhere.

Godou could feel an elastic and supple sensation on his back together with a sense of volume.

More conspicuous than anything else was the immense strength of the arms embracing Godou from behind, wrapping tightly around his neck—

"Godou. Do you intend to engage Ena-san in loving intimacy, neglecting me on the side?"

The voice whispering in his ear was, of course, the usual familiar one.

"Ah, what happened? Erica-san arrived faster than Yuri. But no matter. We two will play the role of His Majesty's lovers, how's that?"

"Role playing is redundant. Because I am truly Kusanagi Godou's lover. However."

Erica declared proudly to Ena who listened nonchalantly. But a fearless lioness' smile immediately surfaced on Erica's face while she and the Hime-Miko of the Sword nodded at each other.

"Perhaps this is not such a bad idea. For a stubborn someone who obstinately clings to his opinions, this is a good opportunity to let him realize the unparalleled extent to which his behavior is the antithesis of being human."

"E-Erica-san. Since we are simply relaxing in preparation for battle, is this not contrary to what you were saying just now!?"

"She is right, Erica. Besides, these matters should be the job of the grand chamberlain, in other words, me. K-Kusanagi Godou, you should not make a lustful face just because you are sandwiched between those two!"

"Of course I'm not! Could you please direct your sight to my attempts to resist!?"

Dazzling sunshine. A white beach. And also the sea.

In any case, Godou's entourage was enjoying these conditions while "waiting" on standby without being excessively off guard.

Then roughly two hours passed—

The first person to look up was Yuri.

Both yesterday and today, she had deployed her psychic sensing to cover the vicinity of the beach so as to discover any emergency immediately.

Liliana also narrowed her eyes, casting her gaze towards the air.

Ever since last night, she had been using a spell that gave warning as soon as powerful magic was sensed.

This was to avoid repeating the same mistakes as during the divine eagle's attack and to prepare against the goddess who could arrive at any time.

Noticing Yuri and Liliana's reactions, Erica smiled courageously and Ena nodded forcefully.

Back on the beach, the girls were currently dressed in their swimsuits with a light parka and t-shirt to avoid getting cold. Godou had also put on a shirt.

While having fun, all of them had remained alert. Then it finally came.

'Kusanagi-sama, I cannot believe you are frolicking with these lowly girls!'

As the goddess' voice thundered, the originally sunny sky suddenly darkened.

Dark clouds filled the sky with frightening speed. A gigantic silhouette of a woman floated up onto this dark canopy of the sky. Slender as a juniper, this was the shadow of the mysterious goddess.

Her head almost reached the clouds. Such was the size of the gigantic silhouette.

'Fufu, only the tasteless would choose the company of such lowly girls. A hero like you should love a suitable partner!'

"On the other hand, I'm pretty sure you're not the suitable one..."

Feeling that a rebuttal would be futile, Godou simply muttered softly.

However, he renewed his spirits and looked up, yelling with a loud voice:

"Are you still refusing to come down here today!?"

The goddess' figure looked as big as a rainbow hanging in the sky, but she was definitely far away.

She was watching Godou and his group from up high in the distant sky.

When having a close encounter with a deity, a Campione's power would be roused intensely. Due to the current lack of that effect, Godou instantly understood. Was the goddess highly wary because she was cut by Ena once?

'Hmm. Kusanagi-sama, you have apparently summoned all your subordinates. This time, I as the queen shall send troops to challenge you, the king.'

"It's not just this time. Haven't you been sending your subordinates every time?"

The enemy called herself the Fire Goddess. Godou felt that she must be hiding something else apart from her name.

Although he wanted to keep questioning her, to probe the matter more thoroughly—

'Fufu. A weak woman and a heroic warrior differ completely in their ways of doing things. Kusanagi-sama, considering the courage it takes for a mere woman to challenge a manly god-slayer , please show generous leniency.'

Things were not going well, The Fire Goddess was messing up all his plans.

Godou had no idea whether it was on purpose or unintentional. However, he was beginning to harbor certain suspicions at this point. Could she be the "most difficult" opponent he had met so far ?

No matter how bad they were, all of his past foes had upfront personalities.

The kingly warriors, Melqart and Athena. Heroic Perseus. The Great Sage Equaling Heaven who simply loved being the center of attention. Lancelot's cool charging spirit.

Drawing a clear line between herself and those warriors, this goddess' behavior often made a display of femininity.

"Oh yeah, it was mentioned she is a witch goddess."

'Come, please let me treat you as a guest this time, Kusanagi-sama.'

While Godou could not help but mutter, the goddess' voice resounded in the sky.

'Fufufufu. I have prepared valuable assassins. After all, the power of divine beasts seems unable to capture you!'

A glorious sacred beast descended from the sky amidst the dark clouds.

It was a white and unruly stallion, its entire body shrouded in golden flames. Unlike the previous divine beasts, its body size was not abnormally large. Although its build was robust, the size was still within common sense for a horse.

Kicking its hooves in the air, the stallion flew nimbly through the sky. As soon as he saw that sacred majesty, Godou instantly realized.

"Godou-san! That is Verethragna's incarnation—the [White Stallion] stolen by the goddess!"

Yuri also knew from spirit vision. This confirmed Godou's instincts.

Not only did she steal, she could also make use of them...

'Due to a lack of time, I was unable to make all of them my servants... Kusanagi-sama, please enjoy a battle with your own kindred!'

Informed by the goddess, Godou frowned.

The girls also looked up at the [White Stallion] with grim stares.

They too must have noticed the powerful godly powers residing in the flying divine horse. A troublesome foe had appeared, one vastly surpassing the "firebird" that had received the goddess' protection.

Part 3

"Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."[22]

Erica chanted the spell words of smiting in order to wield the [Sacred Privilege of Extermination].

In response to her spell words, Cuore di Leone transformed from a slender longsword into a barbed lance. Simultaneously, an oval shield also manifested in the red knight's left hand.

"They warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males! And they slew the kings of Midian!"[23]

It went without saying, this was Liliana's smiting.

Her magic saber, Il Maestro, transformed into a silver crafted longbow, a deadly weapon for firing sacred arrows of extermination.

These were the secret arts of combat magic that stood as the trump cards of European knights.

Nevertheless, their target was Kusanagi Godou's oft-used [White Stallion], the symbol of Verethragna as the heaven-sent child of the sun.

'Very well, Kusanagi-sama, the heavenly horse that transports the sun—Savor its power well. Fufu, even if its hooves of scorching flame happen to incinerate you completely, my secret drugs can still revive you from the ashes!'

"This is going beyond twisting my arms and legs off!"

Godou angrily retorted from the ground in response to the assertions made by the goddess' silhouette.

From the ashes—Godou was suddenly struck with a thought; immortal deities did indeed exist. In that case, gods capable of reviving the dead might actually exist.

Hopefully not to prove this point, the [White Stallion] charged straight towards him from the sky.

"Everyone, please do as we decided earlier. Hurry and run!"

Godou instantly yelled.

In his current condition, only one incarnation was actually available. In order to fight the most effectively under such restrictions, Godou had already discussed with the girls their battle plan for today.

Although contrary to expectations was the enemy's use of existences surpassing divine beasts as her servants—

But the fact remained unchanged that their plan was the best and only solution. Only that the risk of the "bait" role had vastly increased...

Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena all scattered according to plan.

This was to distance themselves from Godou. Just before she left, Erica seemed to be yelling something but Godou could not catch her words clearly.

The incoming [White Stallion] from the sky kicked Godou using its front legs. To him, it felt like being sent flying by a collision with a giant dump truck.

Godou felt pain from his body as if it was broken all over. He was blown high up into the air. In addition, the burning flames enveloping the [White Stallion] had spread over to his body.

Turned into a tumbler toy on fire, Godou flew through the sky.

The kicking attack did not kill him instantly, probably because he crossed his arms at the last moment to protect his head. In that case...

His remaining move could now be unleashed—!

"All evil-doers, tremble before my strength..."

Now awakened in Godou's body was combat power and endurance obtained in exchange for heavy injuries.

"Upon my mighty self, I shall bear the symbol of the raging camel!"

Falling down on the sand, Godou felt pain all over, but the [Camel] was the ferocious and stalwart incarnation with immense pain toleration. Thanks to this blessing, Godou could endure and stood up immediately.

Increasing his magical power at the same time, he dispelled the [White Stallion]'s flames on his body.

The golden flames he received had been scorching Godou's body until now.

An ordinary human probably would have burned completely, without even a bone remaining. However, these flames were not powerful enough to overcome a Campione's magical resistance and hence disappeared instantly.

Despite suffering burns all over his body, Godou was able to endure the current level of pain.

However, an ominous voice descended from the sky above.

'Fufufu. The show has only just begun, Kusanagi-sama. —O guardian of the righteous, I offer sacrifice and invite you. The one who grants victory and grace, I will perform justice, please direct me towards the light and the righteous path!'

Godou was greatly stunned. To think she was capable of using these spell words!?

Ignoring Godou in his state of shock, the [White Stallion] galloped through the sky once more. In the next instant, the white bronco transformed and expanded in the air.

Unbelievably, it became a gigantic beast measuring ten meters long!

A goat with jet black fur. As if swimming freely in the water, it flew leisurely through the air.

"It changed form...!?"

As Godou watched in shock, the black goat overhead—the [Goat] incarnation began to bleat.

BAAAAAAAAAAH!

Instantly, the goat's giant body released an extra large bolt of lightning, striking mercilessly at Godou on the ground and his surroundings. Fortunately, Godou had already raised his magical power just now.

Even divine lightning should not be able to defeat a Campione so easily.

"Guh—huh!?"

Suffering the terrifying lightning strike, Godou found himself sprawling paralyzed on the beach.

Although pain was only natural, his entire body felt numb. During winter, one's fingertip often suffered pain from the shock of static electricity. The current feeling was now a thousand times more intense than that.

And the numbing pain was experienced throughout his body.

Godou surmised he had been bathed in quite a powerful electrical current. A throbbing pain now attacked his heart.

Incredibly, the lightning breached both a Campione's magical resistance and the [Camel]'s endurance, wrecking Godou's body to such an extent. The lightning's power had completely surpassed expectations.

However, the [Goat] flying in the sky had also exhausted almost all of its magical power.

The lightning just now should have depleted the majority of its usable power. In that case, a second strike was not coming—just as Godou concluded, yet another transformation took place.

The black goat turned back to the form of the [White Stallion].

Enveloped in golden flames, the white bronco flying in the sky—Fiercely kicking the air as it flew, the horse swiftly rose in

height. Its figure vanished amidst the dark clouds covering the sky .

Immediately afterwards.

Wrapped in a golden explosion of flames, the [White Stallion] was crashing down like a burning meteorite.

The target was obviously Kusanagi Godou on the ground. Without any remaining strength to evade, Godou was currently lying collapsed on the beach. Furthermore, the [Ram] that had saved him numerous times from the verge of death was already stolen!

An unprecedented crisis. The two paladinos intervened at this very moment.

"Midian's destruction, hereby effected!"

Accompanied by spell words of destruction, Liliana shot an arrow of light.

Sniping at the [White Stallion] that was crashing towards the earth's surface like a meteor, the sacred silver bow shot an arrow that instantly split into eight, tracing out separate trajectories towards their prey. Since the [White Horse] was galloping towards Godou in a straight line, there was no way for it to evade the arrows.

All eight arrows found their mark.

The pure white body of the horse, beautiful and strong, was tragically pierced in eight separate locations, two each on its forehead, neck, chest and torso respectively. But in spite of that, the white stallion's descent did not slow down.

Enduring the severe injuries, it galloped towards Godou, bringing its flames along!

Just as the horse's fiery hooves were mere meters away from shattering Godou's with their kicks, Erica struck the horse of flame from the side.

"O horns, collapse the walls of Jericho!"

Sacred exterminators were briefly granted the ability to fly.

Using this power, Erica flew in a straight line, charging decisively. Striking the airborne [White Stallion] from the side, she stabbed with the tip of her lance.

A full-powered thrust with the lance. Even the [White Stallion] was blown away by this attack.

NEEEEEEEEEEEEEEIIIIIIIIGH!!

The white bronco fell and rolled on the beach, bringing Erica along with it as it neighed shrilly. It was a cry of pain. The blade of sacred extermination had buried itself into the [White Stallion]'s body, inflicting heavy injuries.

Erica swiftly stood up and brandished the lance.

She intended to make a final decisive thrust. However, another transformation took place.

First of all, the flames enveloping the pure white horse turned black in color.

Next, the slender face of the horse transformed into a sturdy bull's head. However, its torso was human—a human body covered with bulging muscles. Moreover, its size was expanding.

Immediately, the white horse had completely transformed into a five meter tall giant.

With a stalwart bull's head, this was a bull-headed giant. Furthermore, a layer of short, dense, black fur covered its entire body.

"—! This is the [Bull] incarnation!?"

Erica wielded her lance to thrust at the bull-headed giant.

But at the same time, the giant went "moo" and boldly swung its long, thick, black, right arm, easily sending the incoming lance flying together with Erica's slender body.

"Yaaaaaaaaah!"

Struck by the [Bull] renowned for its strength, Erica was blown away almost a hundred meters.

With that, she fell into the emerald-green sea. Even so, she still managed to block the mighty arm with her shield, thereby avoiding a critical injury. In spite of all that, she did not loose grip of her weapons. Rather commendable in fact.

"Erica!"

Seeing her longtime friend and rival sent flying, Liliana shot an arrow of light.

The arrow was aimed straight towards the [Bull]'s incarnation of the bull-headed giant. A flash of silver flew towards the black bull's head, but the giant nimbly avoided the arrow.

Make no mistake, nimbly indeed. With agile motions one could not imagine from its gigantic body, the giant leaped up high.

Then the [Bull] landed before Godou's eyes.

It had made its way towards Kusanagi Godou who was lying collapsed on the ground all this time, paralyzed from the electrical attack from earlier!

MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!! The bull roared ferociously, lifting its foot up high.

It was planning to crush Godou beneath the sole of its massive foot.

"...My body, please endure a while longer!"

A crisis of desperate proportions. Nevertheless, this was actually a rare and perfect opportunity.

Godou shouted at his sprawling painful body and started rolling on the sand. Two seconds later, the [Bull]'s foot crushed the spot where Godou was lying earlier!

"I am the strongest, All enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished——!"

Chanting Verethragna's scripture during this time, Godou increased the [Camel]'s power.

The pain consuming his entire body subsided slightly. The sense of paralysis also dissipated gradually. The rest would rely on tenacity and fighting spirit. Godou gritted his teeth and yelled:

"Daaah!"

Standing up through sheer willpower, Godou took a leap—

The bull-headed giant was five meters tall. Owing to the mighty leap, the ferocious bull's black fur-covered face was now right in front of Godou.

Next, using the [Camel]'s leg strength, he unleashed a spinning kick at the [Bull]'s cheeks.

MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!

The [Bull] cried hoarsely, its giant body falling over backwards.

The attack was effective, for it succeeded in inflicting substantial pain. But this was nowhere near fatal—With a glint of light flashing across its eyes, the [Bull] reached out with its stout right arm and caught Godou!

"Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Gripped in the black giant's hand, Godou screamed tragically.

All the bones in his body were creaking. Very soon, they were all going to be snapped, crushed and shattered.

The [Camel] incarnation possessed even better resilience than a Campione's illogically sturdy body. Nevertheless, no matter how stalwart, this body would surely reach its limits within a minute or two!

Even so, Godou still smiled with joy.

As guerrilla fighters, the girls on standby surely would not let this opportunity go to waste.

"O imperial blade Ama no Murakumo, in your best interests which I shoulder, grant power unto me!"

Arriving as expected, Seishuuin Ena was sprinting from the distance, her "partner" in hand!

Filling herself with the divine sword's spirit, divine possession was achieved.

"Yaaaaaaah!"

Ena jumped up high and swung Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi overhead using the *hassou-no-kamae* stance.[24]

Amplified by the might of divine possession, this full-powered slash appeared to spew flames as it made a deep cut on the bull-headed giant's humanoid back. Unable to withstand the attack , the [Bull] fell upon its knees and released its grip on Godou.

"Guh..."

Tossed onto the sand, Godou groaned. His injuries were very severe indeed.

Godou vomited blood but the [Bull]'s heavy injuries were equally serious. Furthermore, ten-odd arrows of light flew in approach immediately. These were the arrows of extermination shot by Liliana.

MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!?

Struck by the arrows, the bull giant roared in pain.

Lying sprawled on the ground and helpless, it had apparently exhausted its strength.

"Your Majesty, are you okay!?"

Having made display worthy of a mighty general, Ena called out with worry.

Godou nodded in response as he panted heavily. This was the best possible battle plan achievable with only the [Camel] incarnation currently at his disposal. At least he pulled it off successfully.

Oh well, as a battle plan it was actually quite simple.

More injury resistant than anyone else, Godou was to attract the divine beasts' attention. At the same time, Ena's role was to perform guerilla attacks using Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi whenever enemies showed openings while busy with the "bait." As for Erica and Liliana, they were tasked with supporting Godou and Ena as appropriate.

Simple as that.

That said, given their current battle potential, there was no other way to fight.

In actual fact, were the enemies of divine beast class, the [Camel] incarnation could have lasted for surprisingly long durations. In that event, breaking through using these foolhardy tactics could very well have succeeded.

But unexpectedly, the goddess was capable of using Verethragna's incarnations as her pawns—

"Wha—!?"

"This time, it's... The [Wind] incarnation!?"

Faced with shock and surprise, Godou and Ena were swept into the suddenly manifesting whirlwind. The bull-headed humanoid giant, in other words, the [Bull] that was just defeated, had lost physical form and transformed into a tornado.

Normally, Kusanagi Godou was the one switching between combat powers in a diverse display.

But this time, the side suffering at the hands of these transformations was Godou himself.

Part 4

The wind strengthened all at once and became a tornado by the time one could notice.

It started out as a small whirlwind only ten-odd meters in diameter. But now, it had become a violent vortex of wind swirling everything up into the sky, baring its fangs towards Godou and Ena.

This was likely working on the same principle as the lightning released by the [Goat] just now.

Elevating its power to the maximum possible in exchange for instantaneous depletion of the majority of magical power. In this manner, the Campione and the divine-possessed sword user were devoured by the tornado and swept up into the air.

It felt like being thrown into a massive washing machine...

Caught in the tornado, Godou and Ena were spun dozens of rotations at high speed.

"Guh... Your Majesty! Use Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi together with Ena—Please!"

Ena yelled as she tumbled around in the vortex of the storm.

Her voice should have been drowned out by the roaring wind.

Nevertheless, Godou heard her loud and clear. Her thoughts were being transmitted through Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi which they shared. Thanks to that, Godou was able to know the Hime-Miko of the Sword's wishes without even asking.

"Okay, Seishuuin! Let's go!"

He imagined the two of them swinging Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi together.

This was what Godou and Ena had shared that night at Kisarazu when the divine sword's power was truly mastered. Taking this opportunity when their thoughts were relayed to each other through Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as the medium, the same could be achieved without resorting to wizardry.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi possessed the trait of absorbing magical and divine powers.

Ena currently planned to use this trait to absorb the [Wind]'s power.

Naturally, even a user of divine possession would be incapable of fully absorbing a tempest sent by a heretic goddess.

However, were Godou to simultaneously infuse the divine sword with a Campione's magical power, then in that case—

"Strong is the name that shall stand across subsequent generations—handed down by all who hears of his exploits!"

In concert with Ena's chanted spell words, Godou poured magical power into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Even the impossible could become possible through bonds of wizardry. Then the divine sword in Ena's hand released pitch black light, absorbing the vortex of [Wind]!

—The tornado spinning the pair weakened progressively.

Although they had already lost count how many revolutions they had been spun, the wind was suppressed all at once, finally dissipating the force that had swept Godou and Ena into the air.

They fell down towards the beach from a height of seven or eight meters or so.

Ena landed with monkey-like motions. Despite having no training in acrobatics, Godou accomplished the same, thanks to the agility conferred by the [Camel].

However, the spinning from just now had destroyed their sense of balance, causing great discomfort.

Greatly exhausted, the pair instantly collapsed and sat on the ground. That said, they were at least liberated from the [Wind].

"Godou, Ena-san!"

"You two, are you okay!?"

Erica and Liliana ran towards them, the former from the sea and the latter from inland respectively.

The red knight was unhurt. The [Bull]'s hit that sent her flying had apparently not caused any injuries. Although she was dressed lightly in a swimsuit, the sacred privilege of extermination must have protected her.

Wielding the barbed lance and shield, Erica bore a stern and imposing countenance.

Liliana was also carrying her sacred bow of silver.

Godou nodded at the two of them. He could not answer because he was desperately enduring the sense of nausea. Ena was completely exhausted.

"The [Wind] just now, it felt like it escaped just before it was completely destroyed..."

Liliana's power of spirit vision allowed to her to see things beyond the naked eye.

She was looking towards the sea. Prompted by her, everyone turned their gaze to follow suit. A solemn expression surfaced on all their faces, for a new incarnation was manifesting.

Upon the emerald-green sea. At this cove serving as the island's entrance...

Over on the sea, black flames were burning. These were also flames that Godou had summoned many times before.

'So says Lord Mithra. The sinful shall be met with justice...'

The goddess' voice came from the sky above.

These spell words that Godou had always chanted, were now spoken softly by the goddess.

'The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice—!'

The black flames over the sea started transforming into a pitch-black divine beast.

Body length estimated to be twenty meters. A pitch-black gigantic beast of a [Boar] bearing a stalwart appearance. However, only the majestic head alone had manifested so far. Below the neck , the rest of the body had yet to form from the black flames.

Apparently, the goddess could not summon and manifest the [Boar] as quickly as Godou.

'Fufufu. Despite the number of strong children among Kusanagi-sama's kindred, I have bestowed special care upon this one as my servant in particular! It does take quite a while longer to summon... But only this child is worthy of the wait!'

Despite clearly in the middle of the summoning process, the goddess spoke as if victory was certain.

But one could not disagree. The incarnations she had sent out one after another were all extremely strong. It would be apt to call them the simple arrangement version of Godou's powers.

However, the divine beast being born over the sea was different . Were it to manifest completely, it could very well possess size, appearance and power no different from Verethragna's fifth incarnation as summoned by Godou.

Just through a single glance at its face, once could tell the ferocity of this monster.

Hovering over the sea were the black flames and the gigantic boar head. Grunting as it exhaled violently, the [Boar] glared condescendingly at the beach, roaring from its grotesque mouth.

oooooooooooooooooooooooo...

Soon to be liberated on the ground to bring destruction to all, it seemed to be expressing its joy of anticipation.

"This must be something she held in reserve. What a troublesome trump card."

"Weaker than under Kusanagi Godou's control—as much as one would hope for that, we cannot tell without a fight..."

Erica and Liliana nodded at each other, their expressions tense from the will to fight.

On the other hand, Godou and Ena's states were far from ready.

Already heavily injured, Godou felt as if his body was made of lead. His movements were also very sluggish. Were it not for the [Camel]'s exceptional trauma endurance, Godou would have fainted a long time ago.

Then there was Ena who had used divine possession thrice already in three days.

Moreover, using a Campione's magical power, she had just drawn out Ama no Murakumo's powers at a level beyond human limits. The tough child of nature was clearly approaching her limits, her body shaking unsteadily.

"Don't force yourself, Seishuuin. Rest for a while!"

"Nonsense, Your Majesty. How could I remain idle at a time like this..."

Ena remained stubborn. In a rare moment, her voice lacked her usual cheerfulness. Using Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as a crutch, she supported herself.

"You cannot, Ena-san!"

The one who reprimanded the Hime-Miko of the Sword was Yuri who was supposed to have retreated to the rear.

"Your life will surely be endangered if you continue like this! I absolutely forbid you to act recklessly!"

Yuri spoke with a terrifying and intimidating expression.

However, she walked over to the weakened Ena's side and caressed her back gently like a mother.

A spell of caressing—she was applying recovery wizardry to heal Ena's painful body.

Ena's trump card, divine possession, was said to require a week's interval between successive usage. Exceeding this frequency would mercilessly wear away her mind and body—

Indeed. Godou nodded.

Yuri must have run over to heal and restrain Ena because she knew her childhood friend was at her limits.

"But everyone could very well be taken out, so having Ena rest by herself is meaningless. This is the time for a last stand. Don't worry, I'll just force myself a little and still be fine."

"How absurdly driven by emotion you are, Ena-san. I now understand the reason why you get along with Godou so well."

Erica commented with a frown.

Also, the tone of her voice sounded more "deeply impressed" than surprised.

"But no, denied. Please stay still obediently. Verethragna's [Boar] is nowhere lacking as an opponent for knights. Please leave this for us to handle."

"Indeed, it has come to this."

Liliana spoke up.

"Ever since we came to this island, you have been the one protecting Kusanagi Godou all this time. It is about time you let us have an opportunity to take the stage."

Godou nodded vigorously in agreement.

However, the silver-haired knight frowned in response, expressing her regrets to him.

"Allow me to add to that, Kusanagi Godou. You too should also rest, right?"

"Eh?"

In the instant Godou asked in response, he suffered an unexpected attack.

Liliana performed a sweeping kick. Although Godou intended to evade, his legs were unable to move. Swept off balance splendidly, he fell over on his bottom.

Seeing him like that, Liliana and Erica both sighed.

"I knew it... Only your sense of pain is numbed, but your body is already at its limits."

"You have accumulated extraordinary injuries starting from earlier. I had a feeling this would happen if you lost your incarnation of immortality."

"I-I'm fine. My wounds are healing at an incredible rate."

"Well. Using healing magic combined with the [Camel]'s recovery abilities, perhaps you could force your body a little more."

In response to Godou's protests, Erica replied with deep thought.

"Honestly, it is impossible to fight that [Boar] barehanded."

Everyone turned their gaze towards the cove.

What was just a [Boar]'s head a while ago had now manifested to its chest area. Once the flames formed the gigantic beast's body completely, the pitch-black destroyer was probably going to rush onto the beach with terrifying vigor...

For the [Camel] which offered no other means of attack apart from "kicking," it was a most difficult opponent indeed.

"I'm not barehanded. One could still say I have a weapon."

Godou threw his "partner" a glance. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi that Ena had stabbed into the sand to use as a crutch.

Walking over with unsteady steps, Godou grabbed the sword's hilt.

Despite his reluctance to get close to dangerous tools like swords, it was the time to put pacifism aside for now.

"Are you able to use it without Seishuuin Ena?"

"I should be. I managed it during the Kisarazu battle against Lancelot..."

While thinking about how careless he was, Godou replied to Liliana's question.

Indeed, Kusanagi Godou only truly used Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi for the first time back then, in a clash with Lancelot who wielded the Divine Sword of Salvation.

"Besides, relying on you two, Liliana and Erica, to do something like fighting the [Boar], that's not gonna work. Unless that guy gets struck by firepower on the [White Stallion]'s level, there's no hope for victory..."

Well, the question was whether Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had that level of destructive power.

The "partner" had exhibited its highest level of destructive power during the Kisarazu battle. In order to oppose the Divine Sword of Salvation used by the "King of the End," the silver-haired goddess had powered up Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The mortal enemy in the form of a pubescent girl with silver hair and eyes of night.

The goddess bound to him by a strange twist of fate. How nostalgic to recall the opponent who vexed him by escaping after her victory, it was a lonely feeling. Heretic Athena—

'Farewell is unneeded. One day, this goddess shall return, reincarnated, to seek you for revenge. Because no matter when, the only one allowed to defeat Kusanagi Godou is this goddess!'

The bold declaration uttered at the point of farewell.

Her fighting spirit was completely opposite to the "femininity" displayed by the current goddess Godou was fighting. Rather than bold, one would prefer to describe her as noble. And there were her words.

The one and only parting gift she had given...

—the [Gate] had opened for but an instant.

Creation of heaven and earth. The death and birth of stars. The blade forged through the goddess' wisdom.

That was it. They had also banked on Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi back then. The steel that greedily devoured the enemy's power to assimilate as its own. That characteristic was essential for a drastic move.

If you are in need of strength at this time, why not infuse me, the divine sword, with the most powerful wisdom—?

"Godou, what's with you?" "Kusanagi Godou!?" "Your Majesty...?"

The voices of his companions sounded distant.

However, what occupied Godou's field of view was neither the sight of the girls in their swimsuits nor the emerald-green sea. It was a pair of eyes. Owl eyes shining amidst darkness.

Godou also sensed it. He sensed a "certain secret technique" dormant within his body.

"Godou-san... Please pull yourself together!"

Suddenly, he felt someone touch his hand. The tactile sensation caused Godou to return to himself.

Brought back to his senses, Godou found Yuri by his side. She had placed her hands over Godou's hands that were holding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Erica, Liliana and Ena watched with a face of wonderment.

Godou shook his head hazily. He seemed to have caught a glimpse just now. Heaven and earth's creation, the technique embodying destruction and creation. The wisdom of the universe left behind by the goddess of earth and darkness—

"...Ugh. What on earth is this..."

Carved into the depths of his heart and mind, a powerful secret technique in the abyss.

A relic left behind by the deceased rival. The gate was currently opening. However, this wisdom was far too colossal. Given Godou's capacity instead of a goddess', comprehension should be impossible regardless.

No good. It was impossible to control no matter what.

Precious long-awaited power was obtained yet it was going to be wasted... Just at this moment.

"Godou-san. Please look at me. Do not worry."

Once again reminded by Yuri's voice, Godou jumped in surprise.

The Hime-Miko was staring directly into Godou's eyes. Her adorable and beautiful face was pressed rather near. It was almost like past times when she transmitted knowledge about gods.

Finding himself at this type of close separation, Godou began to panic. But thanks to that, his sense of self returned.

He was also greatly surprised by Yuri's murmuring whispers.

"Steel embodying the birth and death of stars... The dark blade of heaven and earth's creation. The flames of the scorching jet-black divine sword... I saw them too."

Yuri spoke solemnly. She was having a spirit vision.

The other girls were staring at the Hime-Miko with amazement. Moreover, Yuri's eyes had changed to the color of glass at some point in time.

Godou realized at this time.

Eyes the color of glass. Radiant flaxen-colored hair. These characteristics belonged to the Princess of Glass residing in the Netherworld.

Yuri's current appearance was the splitting image of the Netherworld's noble one. Speaking of which, Yuri's hair color was heavily shaded brown for a Yamato Nadeshiko.

Godou began to wonder for no apparent reason. Suppose the Princess of Glass was the root of the Hime-Miko bloodline.

Then the Hime who most strongly displayed the inherited blood and spiritual powers of the distant ancestor—wouldn't that happen to be Mariya Yuri?

"The secret technique the goddess left behind in Godou-san's body... I think it is probably through the opened gate that I am able to see it... Let us forge it together."

Godou was rendered dumbfounded by Yuri's resolute proposal.

"Let us forge. To forge the sword of the beginning and the end. I shall guide you."

Part 5

Over the sea in the cove, the [Boar] finally finished materializing.

A stalwart black boar's head, chest, front legs, torso, rear end and even hind legs were already manifested, surfacing on the sea like a giant whale. The only remaining body part still shrouded in flames was the tail.

"Let us take this opportunity to make an attempt."

Liliana suggested softly and drew her sacred bow of silver.

Injecting the privilege of extermination, she shot an arrow of light.

Although the beach where she stood was roughly two hundred meters from the [Boar]'s location on the sea, the arrow from a paladino's arsenal flew straight across this distance instantly.

The target was the [Boar]'s eyeball. But the instant before the splendid shot would meet its mark...

The arrow of light was deflected as if it had struck an invisible barrier.

oooooooooooooooooooo...

The [Boar]'s low growl sounded like gloating over a victory.

"I knew it, this level of attack is not going to work."

"It's acting like it's taunting us... Rather than an incarnation of Godou's that was stolen, the [Boar] looks more like a rebel. Why is that?"

Standing by Liliana, Erica nodded her head as she frowned.

The two knights' mission was to stall for as much time as possible, until Godou, Yuri and Ena's Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi completed the necessary preparations.

As the two knights stood ready on the beach for this purpose, the enemy finally started to move.

ROOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAR!!

Most familiar to the knights, the howling resounding.

The black [Boar] had materialized completely. Like a beached whale, the twenty-meter body of brawn was charging towards the land!

Like a speed boat racing across the water, the [Boar] rushed with astounding speed and vigor.

"Lily. Let's concentrate everything on the first strike!"

"Why!?"

"Not just limited to size and appearance, the [Boar]'s personality could very well be the same as before, right?"

"I see. Tactics for dealing with a child's temper tantrum!"

A brief battle conference.

For the longtime pair, the exchange was quite sufficient.

Immediately, Liliana transformed her weapon.

Earlier, it had taken the form of bow and arrows to apply the sacred privilege of extermination. Now, it was changing forms to a polearm with a saber's blade, a glaive.

Then it came—

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAR!!

With speed that a gigantic monster should not possess, the [Boar] reached the beach and began roaring as soon as it landed.

Then it flashed its ferocious gaze as it glanced about its surroundings, searching for its prey—the god-slayer Kusanagi Godou whom the Fire Goddess had designated as the target.

It completely disregarded the two paladinos. Liliana took flight at this time.

"O wings of Artemis!"

The exterminator form conferred powers of flight. At the same time, Liliana was already a witch skilled in flying.

Enveloped in blue light and tracing a trajectory even smoother than Erica's, Liliana flew towards the air above the [Boar].

While in mid-flight, she slashed the [Boar]'s back.

However, the blade could not cut. In the instant of contact, the black monster's body gave off an invisible shockwave, blowing away the sacred blade and Liliana.

"Guh!?"

Struck by the shockwave while in flight, Liliana lost balance.

But she nimbly adjusted her posture and resumed flying. Several seconds later, she took up a position overlooking the [Boar]'s muscular back and hovered motionlessly in the air.

Meanwhile, the [Boar] continued to head towards the island's interior with an expression of derision.

From its perspective, Liliana was probably recognized as just a little flying bird.

"So what deflected the arrow just now was this..."

Liliana turned her gaze towards the ground. Erica had already completed preparations to charge.

Enveloped in red light, she readied her shield and barbed lance.

Liliana smiled smugly. The slash she performed just now was like a reward in passing. The "first strike" mentioned by her longtime friend and rival referred to what was coming next.

Next, the two knights chanted spell words simultaneously, from the air and from the ground respectively.

"O Saint Manuel, play the music of the heavens, manifesting angel's wings on my arms!"

"O Archangel Gabriel, bestow blessings in protection from the lion's tyranny!"

Erica and Liliana's weapons carried the sacred privilege of extermination.

These spell words composed a blessing for a one-time amplification of their abilities through a massive infusion of magical power. Although it could not strike the enemy with equal might, this was sufficient.

Their goal was not the [Boar]'s defeat but simply to attract its attention. All they needed to do afterwards was leave the rest to the [King]!

" "Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!" "

The two knights yelled as the charged towards the [Boar].

Erica kicked the ground and flew up towards the black divine beast's face.

Although she could not perform agile turns and hover motionless in midair on Liliana's level of aerial mobility, the red knight was clearly much faster when traveling in a straight line.

Aiming at the [Boar]'s face, she made a thrust with her lance towards the eyeball on the right!

Furthermore, Liliana was descending rapidly as if tracing out an arc. Likewise she slashed the glaive's blade towards the right eyeball!

—Huff. The [Boar] snorted violently, releasing shockwaves from all over its body.

These shockwaves were supposed to blow away the two sacred weapons together with the knights. However, Erica and Liliana were able to withstand them, having amplified the privilege of extermination.

The two of them put all their strength into the attack!

GROOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAN!

Painful roars were emitted from the [Boar]'s gaping jaws, causing the sky and the air to vibrate.

Erica's lance tip was buried deeply while Liliana's blade also severed the eyeball sharply.

This was not simply destruction of the eyeball. Using sacred might capable of slaughtering even divine subordinates, they thrust their weapons through the eyeball and into the depths of the [Boar]'s skull, to the location corresponding to the brain.

Even a divine beast should have suffered a fatal injury—

However, the [Boar]'s remaining left eye began to swivel vigorously, glaring at the two knights before its eye with clear wrath.

Then immediately, it emitted an intense roar.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAA!

This time, the knights could no longer withstand the impact.

Erica and Liliana were both blown away by the roar's shockwaves and sent crashing towards the ground.

Falling on the sandy beach, they kept rolling. Were they not protected by the privilege of extermination, they would probably have been smashed to pieces.

"What an irate fellow as expected. We are nothing in its eyes, but that's exactly how we landed the first strike successfully as planned—"

"Undefeated even by this, it has completely surpassed the rank of ordinary divine beasts!"

"It's probably as strong as when under Godou's direct control. The goddess must have infused her power into it!"

Barely managing to stand up, Erica and Liliana nodded at each other.

Turning their gaze, they found the [Boar] glaring viciously down at the two of them, its remaining left eye seething with wrath and hatred.

In addition, the black divine beast had forgotten its original goal .

"Just as we had hoped, we now have its attention. An irate fellow indeed."

"Then we just need to continue attracting its attention. Until Godou and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi arrive. Time to fly like a butterfly, Lily."

"I would not harbor much optimism for stinging like a bee... It's coming!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar] finally rushed towards them, accompanied by a thunderous roar.

Displaying the same intense furor it directed towards destroying giant structures, it seemed to be charging straight to crush Erica and Liliana.

Its roars rocked the ocean and shook the land as shockwaves.

The two knights' mission was to buy time for the [King]. The telling blow was inflicted in hopes of the [Boar]'s tendency to get carried away on whim. This led to the [Boar] attacking them, forgetting its initial target of Kusanagi Godou.

The plan went off smoothly, but there was still a problem.

One could probably consider powering up on whim a trait of those who get carried away easily. Moreover, the [Boar] was clearly one who possessed such tendencies.

Powered by wrath and vigor, the black divine beast displayed more savagery than usual. Dancing like butterflies, Erica and Liliana engaged the enemy in a desperate battle.

Meanwhile, the Hime-Miko of the Sword was—

Her irreplaceable "partner," Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, was stabbed into the ground.

"I implore you, Ama no Murakumo. Drain the divine spirit of heaven and earth to become His Majesty's new power!"

Ena prayed as she yelled.

Although she was unable to fight any further, she was still able to act as the divine sword's manager.

While retreating to the back of the beach as she watched the red and blue knights battle the [Boar], she completed her task.

The jet-black steel standing majestically on the beautiful beach of pure white—

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was now absorbing everything. Absorbing the essence of the water and the earth in this island. Absorbing the life nurturing blessings of mother earth goddesses.

One more thing.

"Due to being in this situation, even that English prince's authority can also be absorbed!"

Even the labyrinth's magical powers apparently left behind by England's Campione were being absorbed.

This authority originated from Minos, the bull-headed god of the land. Its divine power carried the same qualities as what Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi hungered for.

In that case, it would be wrong not to take these powers. Ena's actions were quite appropriate.

As Godou relied on his companions' efforts, the preparation of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was almost complete.

Godou watched Ena from behind as she concentrated on her task, then turned his gaze towards Erica and Liliana's battle with the [Boar] in the distance as he asked the Hime-Miko standing beside him:

"So Mariya, tell me. What should I do next?"

"I saw the technique of heaven and earth's creation—I will use the power of psychic sensing to transmit the contents to you, Godou-san. After that, just use the imperial blade of Ama no Murakumo to perform it."

Yuri explained eloquently.

"However, I can only transmit knowledge within the realm of understanding provided by my spiritual senses. Furthermore, you will likely suffer all sorts of discomfort. Please prepare yourself mentally before proceeding to receive."

"You mean I won't be able to perform it if it's incomplete?"

"Not only that. This should be wizardry accompanied with immense risk and danger, as only befitting for the technique created by the goddess Athena, using the Divine Sword of Salvation for reference."

Yuri was talking about wizardry no human body could withstand.

Nevertheless, Godou had to go through with it. If this battle continued as is, defeat would likely be the final outcome. It was time to stake everything he had.

For the sake of defeating the mysterious Fire Goddess, to let everyone leave the island.

Turning his gaze, Godou found Erica and Liliana running all over the place, chased by the [Boar]. Their aim was not to defeat

the beast but simply divert its attention away from Godou and the two Hime-Miko.

However, the [Boar] was not simply a monster with a gigantic body.

It possessed terrifying power combined with astounding speed and acceleration.

It could instantly close distances even up to a hundred meters, raising its front legs to trample everyone on the ground. It was even capable of firing shockwaves as a ranged weapon to attack a wide area.

Trying to keep this kind of monster pinned down in such a narrow beach—

The ground's foundation could not possibly hold. The instant Erica and Liliana stopped moving, the [Boar] was probably going to take their lives.

"Okay, let's do it. I think it's great that no one on the island is a stranger. After all, I can't act this reckless in other places."

"Yes. If this was happening in Tokyo, I could not help you."

Godou's heartfelt comment was met with Yuri's answer in the same tone of voice.

This was a feeling Godou could never resonate with Erica and Ena. Presumably thinking of the same thing, Godou and Yuri smiled wryly simultaneously.

However, their expressions tensed immediately and they turned to face each other again.

"Well then, Mariya, I am relying on you, do it!"

"Y-Yes, Godou-san. L-Let us do it together!"

" "....." "

The sudden discrepancy in meaning compelled the pair to gaze into each other's eyes.

What Godou meant was for her to apply psychic sensing and " do it." But Yuri's answer seemed to imply that they "do it together. " Was the spirit power of psychic sensing not something that the Hime-Miko applied on Godou?

"Yeah, didn't you do it before in the battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Mariya? Just use that kind of sensing again ."

"I-I was only able to do it that time because of your protection, Godou-san, which augmented my powers substantially. Even if I attempted to use my powers on a Campione under normal conditions, there would not be any effect..."

" "....." "

This time, the two successfully reached agreement as they gazed into each other.

They must perform the usual ritual. To think they had to engage in that kind of behavior when everyone else were fighting for their lives. But no one was watching at the moment. And no matter what, it was a necessary step—

"V-Very well... I am ready whenever..."

Hearing Godou whisper softly, Yuri lifted her face slightly.

Their faces naturally closed the distance and came together successfully. Yuri accepted Godou's kiss with a blissful expression, opening her lips to receive him.

Like two halves of a closing shell, their lips pressed together tightly as one.

Just as Godou spontaneously inserted his tongue, Yuri likewise extended her tongue after a brief moment of hesitation.

Like a bow playing against the string of a stringed instrument, their tongues tangled together. Then slowly, the ritual began.

The first to manifest was a black sphere the size of a golf ball.

In the beach of the cove serving as the battlefield, the black sphere manifested in the air above it like a dark blot.

It was a small stellar object quite small in size. But in less than twenty seconds, it had already expanded to a sphere roughly ten-odd meters in diameter, creating a terrifying and imposing presence in the sky.

'A black star of destruction...?'

The Fire Goddess whispered with great surprise.

Like a rainbow hanging over the sky, the goddess had been leisurely observing the beach below. Calm and composed in her word choice all along, she displayed troubled feelings for the first time.

Meanwhile, on the ground—

A change was occurring on the blade of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi which Ena had stabbed into the ground.

The gently curving blade of black metal was shrouded in blue-black flames burning silently. These blue otherworldly flames were without temperature whatsoever. Instead of heat, they gave off extreme cold to the surroundings.

"It's finally started...!"

Watching the changes in her partner's steel, Ena yelled out.

In its current state, she could no longer wield and swing the sword as usual. There was probably only one person in the entire world who could grip this burning metal of black in his hand.

But before returning to the hand of the one and only user, the sword should at least make one strike—

"Ama no Murakumo! I beg you, please help those two girls a little!"

Ena called upon the black metal's will. Instantly, the burning metal of black started moving autonomously.

Floating up into the sky above, the tip of the blade left behind the beach where Ena had stabbed it, then flew towards the red and blue knights who were fighting in the distance.

Erica and Liliana were resolutely fighting the [Boar].

" "By the sign of the black cross! Grant unto us the blood of the Son of God, displaying stigmata to the world!" "

The two knights crossed the lance and the glaive together.

The two weapons formed the shape of a cross. Released from this cross-shaped weapon, white light was flying towards the [Boar] straight ahead.

The light of the sacred cross was comparable in size to the [Boar]'s head.

ROOOOOOAAAAAAAAR!

Blinded by the intense brightness, the [Boar]'s face shrank back greatly.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi flew forth with a whoosh. Brushing past the [Boar]'s face for but an instant, the sword

slashed through its remaining left eye and continued flying towards another direction.

GROOOOOAAAAAAN!

This time it was a howl of pain. Overcome with rage and pain, the [Boar] began to rampage.

Shaking its gigantic body intensely, it released roars of shockwaves, stomping the ground viciously to express its wrath. But due to losing both its eyes, the shockwaves failed to target the knights. Thanks to that, the two girls breathed a temporary sigh of relief.

"Godou and Yuri seem to have activated the secret technique Athena left behind...!"

"Erica. If we continue to stay here... The situation will be quite terrible. My spirit vision has given warning."

As Erica expressed amazement, Liliana yelled at her.

The two nodded immediately. Just at this moment, the jet-black divine sword that had rescued them reached a corner of the beach several hundred meters away.

The people located there were Godou and Mariya Yuri, naturally.

Using his right hand, Godou gripped the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi that was burning with blue-black flames. With the sacred black metal finally returned to the hand of the user, it was time to welcome the "Sword of the Beginning and the End."

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was wielded in Godou's hand.

Instantly, the giant black star in the sky above began to spin.

Like planetary rotation, the black star spun slowly on its own axis, once, twice. As it gradually increased its rotation speed, it was soon spinning at astounding speeds.

Gwoon. *Gwoon*. Unique noises were coming from the black star overhead.

Standing directly beneath this star, Godou lifted Ama no Murakumo up high.

"O King, only by using the black blade to bring about ends and beginnings to the earth and the Netherworld can Your Highness be said to have truly mastered the goddess' wisdom..."

Murmuring softly, Yuri leaned in close against Godou as if she were his spouse.

Her gaze hollow, her tone of voice was also very solemn. Due to the excessive intensity of the oracle obtained through spirit vision, she had descended into a hypnotized state. The images seen by

Yuri were transmitted to Godou's mind through psychic sensing, forming the foundation of the power causing the black star to " rotate."

—Moon and darkness. Mother became the land. The Earth's green hills. The merciless queen of the night.

—Yonder distant star. Deep in the deepest ocean abyss. The underworld's winds blowing through the frozen underground.

—Black steel. Burning black metal. Sword. Sword. Blade. Attraction. Absorption. Compression. Crushed. Pulverized. Released.

—Planetary rotation. Circle traced out. Revolution. Tornado. Hurricane. Storm. Storm. Storm.

Indeed, this was the storm-summoning sword. The sword of freezing. The sword of dragons. The sword of dawn. The sword summoning destruction.

Verily, this was the black blade. Nevertheless, destruction was the beginning of new life, holding both the beginning and the end. Hence, this steel created heaven and earth—!

These unbelievable, fragmented images were running amok inside Godou's body.

"Those that summon storms... A thousand dragons, a thousand snakes. Gather now to become a blade!"

The instant the spell words were uttered from Godou's mouth, a terrifying storm began to blow madly.

Rather than blowing all existences away, this wind served to absorb them. The black star rotating above Godou's head was sucking in everything from the surroundings!

This was akin to objects falling, attracted by the Earth's gravitational pull.

The black star was attracting all creation with an unseen force. Seawater, the beach's sand, soil, trees, stones, rocks, river water, the island's ground—

The invisible gravity was going to draw all creation into the black star.

This force became wind, forming a tornado, resulting in a gravitational storm, blowing madly across this island in the demonic realm. All sorts of existences on the ground were sucked into the black star's interior.

The only ones unaffected by the storm of gravity were Yuri and Godou who held Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high.

Only these two's immediate surroundings remained calm and tranquil, allowing them to stand as before. Also, despite the current fragmented state of Godou's mind, he did not forget a certain matter.

The existence of the enemy. The Fire Goddess who had brought much pain and suffering upon him and his companions—

She must be sucked in as well, to be imprisoned in the cage of the black star.

Godou directed his awareness towards the goddess' silhouette located opposite to the gravitational storm. He pinpointed the presence of the mysterious goddess over on the other side, in order to pull her in!

'!? Unbelievable—!?'

The goddess' distant location must have made her inattentive. Her panicking voice resounded across the sky.

Godou transmitted his thoughts to Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and the black star. Pull her over. Suck her in. Crush her!

'Guh, what authority is this!? Kusanagi-sama, please allow me to take my leave for now. To think that my territory would collapse in this fashion—you are truly terrifying!'

The Fire Goddess' fearful whispers could be heard from afar.

The storm of gravity continued to blow in Godou and Yuri's surroundings while the black star overhead kept sucking in everything on the ground. But Godou also reached his limit at this point.

Was this because of the horrifying burden imposed on the mind and psyche by Athena's legacy technique of heaven and earth's creation?

As if his batteries were drained, Godou lost consciousness.

The storm-summoning black blade, bringing the beginning and the end to heaven and earth. Its seal had merely been lifted here, yet to truly ascend to becoming Kusanagi Godou's weapon.

Meanwhile, the other girls who had already realized the danger —

As soon as the storm of gravity appeared, Liliana had immediately invoked flight magic.

Taking flight while carrying Erica, the silver-haired knight subsequently picked up Ena and swiftly escaped from the island of the demonic realm.

Standing in the eye of the storm, Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri's figures could not be confirmed visually.

Liliana groaned "guh" softly and immediately gave up on rescuing the two of them. Enveloped in blue light together with Erica and Ena, she flew them back towards the city of Kota Kinabalu.

Afterwards, the storm of gravity proceeded to fully unleash its mighty power.

The storm must have blown for dozens of minutes. During this time, the island where the goddess and the divine beasts lived was completely blown away and wiped off the surface of the ocean.

Kusanagi Godou and Athena's secret technique, the gravitational storm caused by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, destroyed an island completely.

Moreover, only the emerald-green sea and a bit of reef remained in the coastal region around the formerly existing island. The perpetrators, Godou and Yuri, were also nowhere to be found.

Meanwhile, at the same moment as when the storm of gravity finally calmed down—

The location was a certain forest in the French region of Brittany . Deep in this forest by a certain lakeside, a silver-haired girl looked up into the sky. Watching the winter constellations with her eyes of darkness, she listened carefully with her ears.

But she had no idea why.

Miraculously, she could sense the presence of a storm created in a faraway region of the ocean.

"Hmph. Guided by ill fate, an encounter with this goddess lieth in the future... Verily, this destiny summoned a storm, has it not?"

These words rolled over the tip of her tongue like fine wine.

Slowly and carefully, she savored the premonition of the inevitable battle.

Chapter 6 - The Two Who Were Washed Away...?

Part 1

New Year's Day had passed. It was roughly 4pm on January 2.

Before Kusanagi Godou were the vast emerald-green South Seas .

Furthermore, currently beneath some trees in a white beach's shaded corner, he was staring into the eyes of his one and only companion—Mariya Yuri.

They were both dressed in swimwear. Apart from that, Godou was wearing a shirt while Yuri had a windbreaker. From a bystander's point of view, these two probably looked like a Japanese couple enjoying a swim at the beach.

But that could not be further from the truth. After forging the " black blade" and destroying the island of the demonic realm using a deadly gravitational storm, only mere hours had passed.

After that, the two found themselves collapsed on this beach by the time they regained their senses.

Other than physical exhaustion and severe depletion of magic, their bodies showed no abnormal symptoms and one could consider them safe and sound. (Godou also owed his current vigor to Yuri's casting of healing magic back when performing the ritual.)

But it was true that they were currently on an unknown beach somewhere.

They had already frantically investigated their surroundings accordingly.

"Simply for the fact that this is Malaysian territory and inhabited, we are already quite fortunate. But let alone an airport, this is a remote island where ships only come once every three days..."

Godou muttered with deep feeling.

The only person around was a Caucasian male surfing in the distance. This was not a usual tourist destination for enjoying a swim at the beach. After all, this place was terrible in terms of transportation.

Locals had explained that only experienced surfers and scuba divers considered this a good place to visit.

As a remote island somewhere in the South China Sea, the population was definitely less than a thousand.

"Since this is Malaysia, at least the money exchanged beforehand can still be used."

Yuri nodded. The two of them were still wearing the same clothes as when they were swept away by the sea.

Could one consider this fortune amidst misfortune? The windbreaker Yuri had put on at the island's beach was suitable for

both hiking and protection from wind. Furthermore, her purse was in her pocket.

Not only coins and paper tender but also US dollars and Japanese yen, very precious in many aspects, were kept in there.

"But there isn't much in total, so we can't afford to waste any."

"If we are returning to Borneo, we must reserve enough money for that trip."

A regular ship came by once every three days on schedule. The one from this morning had already departed just earlier.

In other words, the next ship would arrive three days later. Godou and Yuri had to think of a way to survive on their limited cash.

Things would be fine as soon as they contacted relevant parties of interest, but neither of them had their cellphone. In other words, without a contact list, they had no numbers to call.

"I must apologize. I cannot even remember my home telephone or Kaoru-san's number..."

"I haven't memorized any useful contact info either. Don't worry. Oh well, we'll just cross our bridges as they come."

Godou comforted Yuri in her depression.

He knew that being technologically incompetent, Yuri even went as far as to avoid her home telephone. Hence it was only

natural for her to be unfamiliar with that string of numbers. Although Godou knew his own home number, there was no way he would tell his mother about his current situation.

"Erica and the rest must be trying to track down our location."

Godou's memories of swinging the black blade were quite hazy.

But he could still vaguely recall seeing the blue light of flight magic. Not only Liliana, but Erica and Ena were together with her as well, so the trio should be safe.

"But to think it had the power to blow away an entire island..."

"I'm sorry. As expected, with me in control instead of a goddess, simply unsheathing the sword already exhausted all my strength... Looks like it's quite hard to control..."

Recalling the catastrophe from several hours earlier, the two of them hung their heads at the same time.

Furthermore, although Godou tried to attack the goddess back then, she should have most likely escaped. Indeed, trying to use the black blade as a weapon in the current situation seemed quite challenging.

"Well, in any case, I'll have to trouble you for now, Mariya. I'll be in your care."

Without a single penny in his pocket, Godou naturally had to turn to Yuri.

It was still unknown how long the duo would have to live here. The one holding the purse strings during this time would be Yuri. Of course, Godou intended to split costs and pay her back afterwards.

But Yuri stiffened her expression and declared sternly:

"No such thing. Since this is an emergency situation, the money here belongs to both of us. Please do not say 'I'll be in your care' or anything of that sort."

"No, this is only right."

"Then I should be the one to say it instead. Godou-san, although I may be unworthy, please let us get along well during this time."

This time, Yuri bowed her head and deliberately knelt down formally on the sand in *seiza* posture.

The Hime-Miko's seriousness made Godou quite flustered. Then as she looked up and their gazes met, they both burst out laughing.

The two of them found their polite behavior hilarious.

After that, Godou and Yuri went shopping in the grocery stores by the coast.

Clothes such as t-shirts. Daily necessities. Sweetened buns and mineral water for a belated lunch.

In a certain way, the current situation resembled the beginning phase of an RPG.

Having bought their equipment, it was time to find a place to stay for the night. There was only one choice in this regard.

This remote island was not a tourist destination. From what they heard, a set of cottages by the sea was the only room and board facility. No better hotel existed on the island.

Although it was a little problematic, the pair decided on the cottages as their accommodations then went out for dinner.

Even choices in this area were quite few. A diner-style place was the only eatery near the cottage. Without any hesitation, Godou and Yuri entered.

Yuri ordered ethnic style fried rice—*nasi goreng*.

As for Godou, his order appeared to be curry cooked with a white fish resembling Spanish mackerel. Containing okra and eggplant, the flavor of the fish stock came out particularly well.

Although it was not particularly delicious, one could count their blessings for the fact that it was not terrible.

While tasting each other's food, the pair finished their dinner without incident. However, a bit of a problem arose when Yuri took out her purse to pay.

The staff lady spoke cheerfully in English as she summed up the bill.

"Visiting this kind of island specifically, what a weird married couple you are!"

She must have concluded based on the way they ate together.

That said, Godou did agree that this island did not feel like the type couples would normally visit as tourists.

With Godou dumbstruck by the question, Yuri bowed her head and answered:

"N-No, we are not in that kind of relationship. We are simply, umm, just classmates, wholesomely... Well, not exactly this kind of relationship either... I mean..."

But she was answering in Japanese, all in a mess.

She was apparently flustered by the misunderstanding. After that, the pair left the shop and returned to their temporary lodgings at the cottage. Along the way back, Godou and Yuri remained silent.

This could not be helped. Due to the question raised just now, the problem of their accommodations was highlighted once again.

The quaint little cottage was built on the seaside.

At least it was equipped with a bathroom. Considering how cheap the rate was, the bathroom was excessively clean. Due to the fact that this was not a tourist destination, users dirtying the bathroom did not happen frequently perhaps?

Then there was the cottage's problem—

The fact that there were no separated rooms meant that Godou and Yuri had to spend the night under the same roof.

Since multiple cottages were available, there existed the solution of renting one each.

But when Godou considered the idea, Yuri rejected it as "Too wasteful." Advice worthy of a virtuous wife. In the end, they decided to share the same cottage.

This type of open cottage had excellent ventilation and was rich with tropical flair.

However, illegal entry was quite easy if one had the intention. Godou would not feel comfortable letting a girl live alone in a place like this.

Part 2

Back at the cottage, Godou and Yuri took turns showering in the bathroom.

Although they discovered the shower had no hot water, since this was a remote island after all, this inconvenience was tolerable due to the tropical heat.

Furthermore, Godou and Yuri had already spent two nights on an uninhabited island.

While they were there, despite using hot moistened towels for body wiping and swimming in the sea, they had no access to showers, let alone a bath. Consequently, a shower no matter how restrictive still gave them full satisfaction

The actual problem came after that.

A quiet night. Two people alone in a cottage on a liberal island. A dearth of conversation. A delicate atmosphere.

"I-If only we could watch television."

"Q-Quite so."

Their conversation ended with just a single exchange. Then the two fell silent.

Instead, Godou threw Yuri a glance. Feeling his gaze, Yuri bowed her head, but Godou felt that she did so not because she was displeased about being looked at.

Although Godou was unable to read Yuri's mind, for some strange reason, he was quite certain of this.

Furthermore, delusions suddenly began to pop up in his mind —

Such as Godou reaching out to her and then Yuri taking his outstretched hand matter-of-factly, then in this manner...

Godou suddenly jumped in surprise. What on earth was he thinking about!?

Coming back to his senses, he shook his head vigorously. Yuri looked up as a result of his actions.

"What is the matter, Godou-san? Why are you making such a horrible expression?"

"N-Nothing.. It's nothing at all, really..."

Probably suspicious of his answer, Yuri leaned in close. Studying Godou's expression from the side, her face was pressed quite near.

Godou felt his heart beginning to race. Yuri also suddenly jumped in surprise, then lowered her gaze again.

Another silent interval took place.

However, their separation was even closer than before. Not only in terms of their physical distance but also between their hearts, probably—

Godou and Yuri cared for each other beyond necessary levels. Indeed, this probably could not be helped. After all, the two of them had engaged in behavior that crossed the line many times already.

From Godou's perspective, Yuri's attire consisting of a t-shirt and shorts was also quite problematic.

It felt quite fresh to see the classy young lady, whose personal wardrobe was usually limited to skirts, dressed so casually.

Inexplicably, Godou had a feeling that staying in the same room as her might not turn out too well.

Lightly dressed, Yuri's excellent figure was in clear display. Her exposed arms and legs offered a dazzling and unavoidable view of her skin...

This was not the first time for them to spend the night in the same space.

However, last time's situation was completely different. Godou felt his heart thumping in his chest uncontrollably. There was no reason to have a guilty conscience. Clearly he had no intention of doing anything indecent!

"L-Let's rest for the night! M-Mariya, you should be tired, right!?"

"Y-Yes. It is said that children who go to bed will develop better!"

The Hime-Miko's complete non sequitur revealed her agitated state. Of course, Godou was nowhere near composed enough to point that out.

Godou quickly switched off the light and lay down on one side of the two-person bed. Yuri was already lying on the other side of the bed. Then immediately—

"Kyah!"

"What's wrong, Mariya!?"

Hearing Yuri's scream, Godou jumped up immediately.

"Th-There is something cold on the bed!?"

Godou switched on the light and together with Yuri examined her side of the bed—

"Uh... It's a lizard."

"Well... When did it get there?"

A tiny lizard was crawling on the bed. Unfazed by human gazes , it displayed no intention of fleeing. Was it simply slow in reaction or had it grown accustomed to humans already?

Fortunately, it was not a leech or a poisonous scorpion—

As Godou felt relieved, Yuri smiled with a chuckle beside him after discovering the intruder's identity. She had clearly recovered and even used both hands to scoop up the lizard, personally taking it to the window and releasing it outside.

"I wouldn't have thought you'd be the type to be unfazed by reptiles, Mariya."

Godou was impressed by the composure in her series of motions and well as the unladylike manner with which she caught and released the lizard.

On the other hand, his fearless childhood friend Tokunaga Asuka had a phobia of insects, spiders, reptiles, amphibians and

the like, always running away screaming whenever she encountered them.

Meanwhile, Yuri, the person in question, was puzzled by why Godou would feel impressed.

"Y-Yes. Because its size is so small, even my level of strength is enough to carry it out."

An answer that missed the point. His curiosity piqued, Godou inquired as a test.

"Mariya, do you have any creatures you have trouble dealing with? Those whose very sight disgusts you, ones that you'll never want to touch, stuff like that? Such as insects, spiders, frogs, moths etc."

"Nothing comes to mind immediately. Since Hime-Miko training requires going to sacred mountains and shrines in other places, I had many opportunities to come into contact with the local wildlife."

"Really?"

"Yes, because I was frequently together with Ena-san since childhood, this type of contact happened quite often."

I see. Godou understood now.

The majority of places considered sanctuaries or sacred mountains would of course be shrines protected by forests. Frequenting those kinds of places with a child of nature like Ena would naturally produce this result.

"Ah, but there is the cockr... A certain black insect is the exception. That is one thing I have no wish of seeing."

"Well, I'm quite sure of all the people on Earth, those who like them belong to a very small minority."

Located on an island's shore, this place was not only hot but very humid also. That type of creature could very well lurk within the cottage.

But Godou specifically avoided pointing it out. Instead, he felt gratified to witness this surprising side to Yuri. Was this discovery possible only because they had been together for so long?

Godou also noticed.

Due to the commotion just now, the awkward atmosphere between them had been dispelled completely.

Yuri also seemed to have realized this. Looking into Godou's face, she smiled shyly. The mood between the pair became natural as usual.

Godou sat down cross-legged on his side of the bed and Yuri also took a seat on the other side. Even facing each other again, they no longer felt embarrassed. With the light still on, they

spontaneously began to chat casually. Perhaps prompted by the old story brought up just now, their conversation revolved around their childhood memories and middle school experiences.

There were times when conversation ended.

A cottage without a television was naturally silent. But the two of them did not mind.

During these occasions, the pair would silently listen to the waves lapping against this tropical beach. The pleasant sensation was truly impossible to describe.

The next day, Godou went out alone.

He wandered around places like the shore and the pier where a small number of fishing vessels and boats were tied down and moored.

His intention was to directly ask the fishermen and ship owners staying at the island if they could transport him and Yuri to Borneo. However, none of the responses were favorable.

"Oh well, even if there was a boat willing to take us back, who knows if they would be trustworthy or not..."

Godou muttered his grumbles.

It looked like there was no choice but to wait for the regular ship after all. Godou decided to return to the cottage without a fuss. Along the way back, he suddenly realized.

Residing in his right arm, Ama no Murakumo, which had been unusable since yesterday, was now awakened.

Athena's entrusted secret technique relied on the divine sword as a medium, thereby generating a gravitational storm. This drastic move seemed to have heavily strained the sword, resulting in an unresponsive state of slumber earlier.

"...You're fine now?"

Godou's inquiry only obtained an acknowledging "Mmmhmm" in response. Then there was nothing. Too lazy to answer, it seemed .

Since the sword probably had not fully recovered from exhaustion, Godou decided to overlook it. The fact that Yuri and him were able to drift to this island safe and sound was surely thanks to Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's protection.

Despite being an arrogant, condescending problem child with no interest in anything apart from battle, the sword is unexpectedly adept at taking care of others.

By the time Godou returned to the cottage, it was already close to noon. He could smell a very fragrant aroma of chicken soup. Entering the cottage where they lived, Godou found Yuri preparing lunch.

"Welcome back. How did it go with the boats?"

"No good. Looks like we really have to wait for the regular ship."

After Godou reported his findings, Yuri went "oh well" as she set down the earthenware pot she was carrying onto the dining table.

Since this cottage was meant as long term accommodations for guests such as backpackers or divers, it was equipped with a kitchen and cooking utensils despite its small size.

In that case, cooking would be more economical than eating out.

While Godou was searching for a boat, Yuri was responsible for buying ingredients and cooking. The timing of Godou's return was perfect, for it seemed like lunch was ready immediately.

Yuri lifted the lid of the earthenware pot, releasing a very fragrant whiff of chicken soup aroma. However, the pot was actually filled with white rice instead. This is rice cooked using soup rather than plain water, Yuri explained. Scattered on its surface were also diced ingredients such as ham and mushrooms.

"I tried to imitate the cooking I saw inside the restaurant yesterday."

In any case, he decided to have a taste first. The taste of Chinese cuisine was delicious beyond description.

Godou felt rather moved, for he never expected to taste Yuri's cooking during this trip. Since they had been relying on instant food for the past few days, her food felt especially delicious.

"I'm so glad for a proper meal like this."

Life on the uninhabited island in the demonic realm. The battle with the goddess. Then there was the gravitational storm the two of them had caused. Godou recalled scenes from the past few combat-filled days and expressed his feelings earnestly.

"Fufu. If you like this kind of food, I can cook it for you every day."

"Really? That's wonderful. I'm so looking forward to it."

" "....." "

Although they had not intended to imply anything else, the pair suddenly fell silent.

The exchange just now was essentially like a couple about to get married or newlyweds... Both Godou and Yuri became aware of this sort of feeling, which would be a bit inappropriate given their current delicate situation, right?

However, they had already overcome many crises similar to the one the day before. Godou averted his gaze slightly and Yuri nodded in return. Silently, they reached consensus to disregard the previous dialogue, minds connected as one.

Yuri quickly made a dry cough and amended her words.

"G-Godou-san. If you wish, I can cook anything for you no matter what."

"R-Really? That makes me so glad."

"Fufu. Please let me know if you have particular likes and dislikes. I will bear them in mind. But since we have been spending time together every day, it is unlikely I would make anything unsuited to your tastes."

"You don't need to worry about that. I think that so long as it's cooked by you, Mariya, I'll be satisfied no matter what."

"If you say something like that, I would be tempted to cut corners, you know?"

"Even if corners are cut, Mariya, it'll still taste good so long as it's cooked by you, right? Instead of eating at a restaurant somewhere, even if it's a half-hearted effort, I'm satisfied provided that it's your cooking, Mariya."

Godou's honest opinion brought a shy expression of happiness to Yuri's face.

Then the two of them noticed once again.

The conversation sounded like a couple who had just started cohabitation.

After all, if two people were living together, they should take turns cooking for fairness. Nevertheless, Yuri was matter-of-factly proposing she take up the role and Godou accepted naturally.

" "....." "

Chatting over such matters as they finished lunch, they cleared up the table.

After that, there was nothing in particular that needed to be done. Until the regular ship arrived, they really had nothing to do but wait.

In the end, the pair went to yesterday's beach for a brief swim, took strolls around the island and passed time in this leisurely directionless manner.

It was simply a casual tropical afternoon with time spent unproductively.

"If this kind of life continued, I think I'd start hating the daily grind of going to school every morning..."

"I-I can understand. If I had remained in Japan, I would still be working my miko duties at Nanao Shrine today. Most likely, I could not be doing anything like this...?"

These kinds of conversations occupied their time.

In any case, it was currently the third day of the new year, an afternoon on January 3.

The beautiful sunset glow had painted the ocean and the beach an orange hue when they returned to the cottage. Then Yuri set about preparing dinner.

Although Godou wanted to help, Yuri refused, saying "the kitchen is too cramped." Consequently, he could do nothing but idly watch the classy young lady at work from behind.

Despite the fact that his companion was toiling by herself, there was surprisingly no feeling of resentment.

Perhaps because they had too much time to spend idling on the island? Or did the reason lie in his companion's modest personality?

Godou was feeling glad that he had a chance to spend time together with Yuri like this. Yuri was also humming happily as she prepared fried rice in an experienced manner.

Despite being a simple dinner prepared casually from existing ingredients on hand, it was quite delicious and completely satisfying.

"Yeah, this is quite good."

"Fufu. Godou-san, I keep getting the feeling you are quite happy."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

A trivial conversation indeed. Time spent together, just the two of them. But this was good enough. But just as it seemed as if this tropical night would pass leisurely like this—

Godou and Yuri heard the noise.

Clang... Clang... Metallic friction could be heard coming from outside. Soon after, a figure appeared at the cottage's entrance. The person approaching while making strange metallic noises was wrapped in a heavy coat despite the island's perpetual summer heat.

"Fufufu. You are here, god-slaying monarch."

The coat was deep blue in color and had a hood which obscured the person's face. But everything became clear as soon as they heard the voice. This was indeed the Fire Goddess whom they had fought yesterday on the island of the demonic realm.

Part 3

The goddess' alter ego was barely humanoid.

But aside from that, the coat's sleeves were abnormally long, covering her arms and legs completely. Without a single patch of skin exposed, this manner of dress was rather jarring in the context of a tropical cottage.

Godou noticed that he did not experience the usual excitement arising from facing a deity.

In other words, this coat-clad figure was not actually the goddess' true body.

"Enough of this. I want to meet your true person."

"In that case, please accept my invitation this time, Kusanagi-sama."

Godou stepped in front of Yuri to protect her. The figure, apparently the goddess' alter ego, proceeded to reply:

"Although you have used your authority to destroy my territory , Kusanagi-sama... I still have another island that once served as my master bedroom. Please allow me to take you there."

Another island huh? Godou frowned. Could this goddess really be that obsessed with islands?

"Fufu. For a stay spanning decades long, I suppose a house needs to be built there."

"Not needed at all. I will simply blow the entire island away like last time."

The black blade exhibited astounding destructive power.

But since Godou could not control it properly, its practicality as a weapon was limited. In fact, he did not even succeed in injuring the Fire Goddess. Nevertheless, it could still be used as a threat.

The goddess had already witnessed the level of power. Was it enough to pressure her—?

However, the goddess' snickers shattered Godou's hopes.

"Indeed I could sense exceptionally terrifying power from that sword. Nevertheless, it is a sword forged from a dragon's remains, controlled via a woman's wisdom... I can tell that you do not possess the knowledge, my dear."

Two glints of golden light shone from the depths of the figure's hood, sinister as a pair of witch's eyes.

"Next time that sword appears, how about I inject my wisdom as the witch who stands as the Fire Goddess? I think it will do just what I want it to."

Godou had not expected her to see through the crucial fact that this was a "weapon wielded by a goddess."

He frowned deeply. Perhaps the Fire Goddess was bluffing, but were that not the case, the situation would instantly plunge into a worst case scenario.

"Come, let us not discuss such uninteresting matters. Very soon, we will arrive at the island that serves as my mattress."

"What on earth are you talking about? I have no intention of accepting your invitation—"

Just as Godou retorted with annoyance, he found someone tugging his t-shirt from behind. This could be no one but Yuri. He also heard the Hime-Miko's whispering voice behind him.

"...Godou-san, please look outside."

What? At her behest, Godou glanced out the window—And was shocked.

The view outside the window was an expansive ocean in the night. At the same time, Godou noticed the ground shaking beneath him, like a ship's hull getting rocked by the waves...

Godou and Yuri exchanged gazes and frantically ran over to the window.

—They were on the sea. The cottage where Godou and Yuri were living in was now floating on the vast, pitch-black ocean like a boat!

Overhead, the sky was filled with twinkling stars. Were he to try searching, Godou could probably locate the North Star which had guided sailors since ancient times. But of course, Godou was not going to do that. He simply glared angrily at the Fire Goddess—or rather, her alter ego.

"Since it is quite a challenge to invite you to come willingly, please excuse me for this type of surprise method. Fufu, please relax and enjoy the boat ride along the way to my island."

"H-How could I possibly enjoy this..."

Godou never would have expected a voyage in the South China Sea, traveling in a cottage rather than a seafaring vessel.

This was far more serious than the time he crossed the Mediterranean together with Athena. Godou clicked his tongue disapprovingly. The goddess must have taken advantage of his diverted attention caused by her appearance. Moving this cottage across the sea, magic was probably used to make it substitute for a boat.

Finding himself completely caught by surprise, Godou concluded that the goddess was still such a tough enemy to handle .

Turned into a boat, the cottage was now sailing in a certain direction. The speed was unexpectedly fast and Godou could see that the lights on the island were already tiny. Accepting it as a done deal, Godou sighed and plopped himself down on a chair.

By this point, there was no choice but to follow along obediently .

Godou communicated to the worried-looking Yuri with his eyes , prompting the Hime-Miko to immediately walk over to his side.

"I got it. Then I'll come to this island to pay you another visit. But don't you even think of doing anything to this girl. Should you dare... I will use that black sword once again."

"Fufufu. Like I already said, I will just—"

"You may have said so, but who knows if it's true or not."

The Fire Goddess had said something implying she would be able to use the black blade very well.

But this magical technique was Heretic Athena's legacy for Kusanagi Godou. Fire Goddess notwithstanding, could she really seize control completely?

Yuri nodded from beside Godou. She seemed to have seen something that reinforced his skepticism.

Precisely because of her, Godou was able to glare at the goddess with confidence. Even if she took half the control privileges, he was still going to fight to the very end with the remaining half.

"Wow, how scary. But no matter. It is only commonplace for a hero like you to be waited on by maidservants. For something so trivial, I could still consent, you know?"

"Don't use words like 'maidservant' or 'waited on.' This girl... Mariya is my companion."

Despite occupying the same room, the goddess treated the Hime-Miko as the god-slayer's possession.

Godou frowned in response to this typically god-like arrogance as he made himself clear:

"She comes with me wherever I go. We will always be together. If you dare lay a finger on her, I will absolutely tear you into a million pieces. Even if it means pursuing you to the ends of the earth, I will make you pay."

Godou seldom voiced threats, but he was completely serious now. He was clearly the one who had brought Yuri to this dangerous place and kept causing her trouble. Although he would rather have his mouth torn open than declare "I will protect you" or the like, conversely, Godou had no trouble swearing revenge openly.

Were Yuri to fall to any misfortune, he would avenge her at the cost of his own life.

Godou felt that this was a distinction of his own, affirmed once and for all. In his mind, Godou was quite surprised to discover himself as a man capable of saying such terrible things—

"Godou-san..."

Yuri gazed at Godou, her eyes clearly conveying how touched she felt. She leaned her shoulder closer to him.

For a noble young lady like her, was she not supposed to be fine with abandoning a recalcitrant like Kusanagi Godou?

Although this was about himself, Godou really believed that.

On the other hand, the goddess reacted strangely to his threats.

"In other words, Kusanagi-sama... This girl is your spouse?"

"S-Spouse!?"

"Based on your words just now, is there any description more apt than that?"

Cold words delivered in monotone. The goddess' excessive princess-like impression felt diminished.

However, Godou's reason for being surprised was not limited to that alone.

"Uh, no, like I said, we're companions. Always together... No matter where I go... Huh?"

In that case, describing her as his spouse did fit after all?

In front of the shocked Godou, the body of the goddess' alter ego gave off a screeching sound and raised its arm.

From the sleeve of the long coat, an arm suddenly reached out. A doll's arm, made of gold. Its index finger pointed straight at Yuri .

"Lowly servant who hinders my search for love... It is only natural that you shall be punished accordingly."

The goddess' fingertip was about to fire something nasty. Without even confirming what it was, Godou instantly reacted.

"Ama no Murakumo!"

He summoned the partner that finally woke up this morning.

The jet-black divine sword instantly appeared from Godou's right arm and flew towards the goddess' alter ego.

Before the golden fingertip could release anything, the divine sword pierced the body clad in the long coat.

The alter ego collapsed on the floor with a crash. From the fallen open coat, the doll wrapped inside was exposed, made of gold shaped into a woman's form. This was the object that had moved like a living human to converse with Godou in the goddess' place.

"Are you okay, Mariya!?"

"Yes. Thanks to Godou-san, I am completely... Kyah!"

Yuri screamed briefly because of a sudden impact felt from the floor.

Then the motion calmed down completely. Up until now, they had been swaying in tune with the boat-like rocking motion as the cottage floated amidst the waves of the South China Sea.

Looking outside, Godou was shocked. The cottage had somehow drifted onto a beach.

'Welcome to the sanctuary that serves as my hall of dreams, Kusanagi-sama.'

The night sky reverberated with the Fire Goddess' cold voice.

'Please make your way into the depths of this island. I will make preparations of hospitality to welcome your arrival.

However, as the price for receiving my love, please hand over this girl—the one considered Kusanagi-sama's spouse! In order to obtain new love, one must forsake the old wife. This is what is known as etiquette between men and women!'

"What kind of utter nonsense is this goddess talking about..."

Godou was stunned by the absurd terms of exchange she proposed.

The midwinter incident that began at Cape Inubou was now reaching its climax through unexpected developments.

Part 4

This time, Godou was truly located on an uninhabited island no one knew about.

He had a feeling this was still somewhere in the South China Sea, except it was unclear which country's marine territory this was. Was it still Malaysia, or maybe somewhere like Indonesia or the Philippines?

Yuri used the spirit power of psychic sensing to explore the island.

According to her report, this place was not as large as the island of the demonic realm. Compared to the city of Tokyo, this island was roughly the area of Yoyogi Park at Shibuya.

In addition, the island lacked greenery and the sparsely growing shrubbery made the rocks particularly conspicuous.

Furthermore, the island's center was filled with an intense divine aura.

"Even my attempts to explore further with tendrils of sensing were deflected. The goddess is surely there..."

"Supposing this island has no water source, it's not a place we could stay for long..."

Godou muttered in response to Yuri's report.

He looked up to find the South Seas' clear and unobscured night sky. Even this type of small tropical island would be prone to sudden showers so they could not afford to waste time. It was necessary to leave as soon as possible.

However, the goddess who would surely interfere was nearby. Without a deity on this island, Yuri probably could have done something using psychic sensing and wizardry—

Godou simply pondered for a brief while to make his decision.

"Mariya, I will go settle things with the goddess."

"Eh? Immediately right now!?"

"Yeah. I think it needs to be done as quickly as possible. Letting it drag any further won't be a good thing."

This was a place where the availability of freshwater was not guaranteed. Hence, victory should be sought as quickly as possible before his stamina waned.

Yuri responded with an expression full of worry for Kusanagi Godou.

"Godou-san, just as the goddess proposed, there is the option of handing me over..."

"No. Do not mention that kind of nonsense again."

Godou sternly cut her off as if refusing to hear the rest of her words.

Yuri answered "Very well" with a delighted expression. Then her face instantly showed tension and she said with a serious voice :

"In that case, please allow me to accompany you. If I venture forth with you, Godou-san, I will surely be able to see the goddess' name and origins."

"But so far, you haven't been unable to, right?"

After asking his question, Godou realized that the usually modest Hime-Miko had declared firmly using the word "surely." Could it be possible!

"Could it be possible, Mariya, you're planning on doing that!?"

"Yes. I intend to use the spell that allowed me to see the origins of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Extracting knowledge of the gods from the Netherworld, to see with these eyes of mine... If I use that spell, I will surely be able to see the goddess' true name."

"Don't talk nonsense. Last time, you almost died because of that!
"

"But you saved me, Godou-san."

Godou could not find any words to refute Yuri's calm response.

As the power of a hero and savior of the world, Verethragna's sixth incarnation, the [Youth], was able to heal those whose lives were on the verge of death for the sake of Kusanagi Godou and bestow protection upon them. However, even if he could save her, Godou did not want Yuri to take the risk. He continued to ponder how to dissuade her.

The Hime-Miko suddenly exhaled and her expression relaxed.

"I want to follow Godou-san to the end, to be together forever. However, this implies a life never far away from danger."

A gentle smile naturally surfaced on Yuri's lips.

"Ena-san, Erica-san and Liliana-san... Everyone knows this very well. They have all fought with their lives on the line for Godou-san's sake. I am the only one who is so weak, always

powerless in times like these. But I also wish to make the most of my abilities in hopes of helping you obtain victory, Godou-san. This sentiment is the same."

Faced with her heartfelt words, Godou hung his head.

Aware of the extent of his incompetence, he did not feel worthy enough to deny her steadfast resolve.

"I want to become your power. Please allow me to do what I can for that purpose."

Indeed. If it were not for himself, she should not have to say something like this.

Godou sighed. After a brief moment of hesitation, he had no choice but to answer in the following manner:

"I am truly sorry that you had to get involved with an idiot like me."

"Not at all. Ever since a long time ago, I have been fully aware that you are a person who causes trouble for others, Godou-san."

Godou lamented how useless he was, unable to say anything apart from apologizing.

Furthermore, Yuri was exceptionally adorable, the way she smiled cheerfully as she offered herself to him.

At the very least, he must obtain "victory" for her and all the girls. Godou lifted his head resolutely.

"Mariya, if *you*[25] can assist me, I will absolutely put that troublesome goddess in her place. Will you lend me your strength?"

In actual fact, Godou had never used such a rude form of second person reference as *omae* to address Yuri before.

Although Godou could casually use *omae* to address the fearless trio of Erica, Liliana and Ena, telling himself "Oh well, it's fine to treat them as if they were guys," Yuri was the one and only exception.

No matter what, she was the most gentle and feminine girl among all the girls around him.

Yet he naturally addressed her in this manner at this time.

"Yes, naturally!"

Godou had no idea if she figured out what he was thinking, but Yuri answered without hesitation. At the same time, she awkwardly added the following as if she had something too embarrassed to bring up:

"Umm... But Godou-san, since this is a spell for prying into Netherworld knowledge through one's own will... It is quite dangerous after all, so I should not attempt it except as a very last resort. After seeing the goddess' name, it would also be quite problematic if I were unable to pass on the information to Godou-san immediately."

Godou nodded in agreement. It was a reasonable assessment of the situation.

"Actually, I have another method I would like to try. It occurred to me spontaneously during your earlier conversation with the goddess, Godou-san..."

One should not underestimate the things that occurred " spontaneously" to this exceptional user of spirit vision. Godou was well aware of this fact.

What kind of secret plan was it? Godou's sense of curiosity and anticipation was piqued.

Taking Yuri with him, Godou walked across the beach for roughly twenty minutes.

Finally, they reached the destination at the center of the island where even Yuri's psychic sensing could not reach. Marble steps covered the ground here.

Perhaps another structure once existed here apart from these steps.

But currently, nothing remained but these steps of stone. Furthermore, there was a ferocious beast present. A lioness.

"Ara... What an unexpectedly early arrival."

"Because nothing will be accomplished even with more time."

Godou was not surprised to hear the goddess speak through the lioness' jaws.

More importantly, his body was now filled with power and his heart naturally became excited. Achieving such a state, Godou could tell that the lioness was the [Heretic God].

This lioness was transformed from the goddess rather than something like a manipulated puppet.

"The girl is here with you, I see. Come, Kusanagi-sama, please bestow this maidservant to me."

Godou deliberately ignored what she said and replied:

"Hey. In the past, did you try to trap that Gascoigne guy, a peer of mine, on this island?"

Godou asked bluntly in order to provoke a response from her.

It was about time to clear up the nature of that man's relationship with this goddess.

"Fufu, of course. His Highness Alexandre is also a present-generation warrior among the god-slayers. A man worthy of a goddess' love. I first met him back when I was liberated."

"What do you mean by liberated?"

"Yes, His Highness was the one who woke me from my long slumber. Together, we searched for the wandering hero."

Hero. A word one could not ignore.

That Gascoigne really did explore this region as expected... Or more accurately, he was probably embroiled in some kind of nefarious affair here. More than likely, it was during the time when he busied himself nonstop because of Guinevere. Godou nodded.

"We created that island together and enjoyed a brief romance... Speaking of His Highness, he left because he tired of life on the island. And he even used his labyrinth authority as a lock to imprison me on there!"

"Ah, so it wasn't actually meant for disorienting intruders, huh."

Godou grumbled in response to the disclosure of this unexpectedly ridiculous truth.

But considering this goddess' temperament and that guy's personality, Godou could imagine more or less how things happened.

Her earlier mentions of "a divine artifact gifted as proof of love" or the like were all lies. Godou was convinced that Alec had approached the goddess with ulterior motives but fled halfway because he discovered she was more troublesome than expected.

"It took me four days to see through the labyrinth's magical effects and bypass them. During this time, that fleet-footed hero already went into hiding. I pondered whether I should destroy this island that had become a labyrinth, but it is the legacy of the man I

once loved after all. Fufu, so that was why I built my residence on the island."

Confronted with the goddess' surprising confession, even Godou himself was overcome with a sense of amazement.

The goddess was unexpectedly adorable in certain ways and Godou began to feel slightly sorry for her. She did not need to specifically preserve something left behind by that man for that kind of reason.

However, this feeling vanished immediately.

"Ever since then, I stayed alone on that island for a number of years before venturing out to seek a suitable new love... And finally, I have found you, Kusanagi-sama."

Divine power overflowed from the lioness transformed from the goddess.

This critical moment had apparently arrived. Godou tensed his nerves.

"Very well, Kusanagi-sama. For the sake of the love between us, please have the maidservant walk over to this side. Fufu, I shall transform her into a pig or a goat and rear her where we live!"

"As if I'd let anyone do that!"

Yuri had been worriedly observing Godou's conversation with the goddess. Hearing the goddess' outrageous words, Godou immediately reached out and forcefully drew Yuri to his side, as if

trying to use his body of a Campione's to protect her and prevent harmful spells from being cast on her.

"G-Godou-san!?"

Yuri was caught by surprise but Godou continued holding her in his arms as he turned his sharp gaze towards the goddess.

His prior sympathy for her was genuine. However, this was the first time someone provoked his temper to such a degree.

Yuri was trembling slightly. One could hardly blame her. For a [Heretic God], who only recognized humans as existences akin to stones, the extent of the goddess' obsession must have terrified her.

Nevertheless, Yuri lifted her head sternly at this time to stare in concert with Godou at the goddess.

She also embraced Godou tightly and asserted thus:

"It should be very clear to you now! Just as you can see, he shall never abandon me. H-He truly loves—he truly loves me as his wife!"

What!? An astounding declaration, completely beyond his expectation. Godou could not help but falter for a second.

"E-Even if you are a goddess, even if you are also capable of enacting miracles, you will never take Godou-san away from my side!"

Godou could not believe Yuri was embracing him tightly as she looked up at him with moist eyes.

She was seeking something, making an appeal to him. Enslaved by her gaze, Godou bent over slightly and brought his face closer to her.

In response, Yuri also shyly drew her face nearer to Godou's and even kissed him on the cheek.

Compared to Erica's passionate skinship, this light peck was a rather stiff display of loving affection.

But Godou felt as though his brain was about to boil, for he never expected her to do something like that—

"Because, great goddess, you have no intention of revealing yourself to him, and neither would you embrace him like this..."

Although Yuri spoke quite stiffly, these were actually words for provoking the goddess.

The goddess watched with displeasure as the two embraced. The lioness' eyes instantly narrowed. It looked as though Yuri's stinging words were right on target.

Godou now understood what Yuri meant when she mentioned another method she "would like to try."

When he asked her about it earlier, she had blushed and refused to divulge her plan.

This really seemed like an acting performance and provocation that only Erica could pull off. Yuri was working hard to realize the imagery she received through spirit vision. Finding the Hime-Miko who was hugging him tightly exceptionally adorable, Godou applied more strength in the arm he was using to embrace her.

Yuri also buried her face into Godou's chest. He whispered in her ear:

"Mariya..."

"Sometimes I wish you would call me by my given name... Only Erica-san and Liliana-san get first name treatment from you... I find it quite unfair. Even Ena-san has been complaining more and more about this recently..."

Although her voice was very soft, Yuri was sulking in a rare instant despite her gentle nature.

Erica and Liliana were foreigners. Calling them by those ridiculously complicated surnames would be quite a hassle—

Refraining from true explanations like these, Godou whispered "Y-Yuri..." in her ear and obtained a very quiet yet satisfied "yes..." from her in response. Judging from the current mood, one could hardly call this an act anymore.

Then Yuri looked up again and challenged the goddess again:

"W-Whispering sweet nothings to each other nonstop with him... A-Are you capable of this? I can feel from my spiritual senses. Indeed, your powers may be great and vast as a witch goddess... But as for your body, surely—"

"Shut up."

Surprised, Godou and Yuri tensed up in their expressions.

The goddess' airs changed. Hours earlier at the cottage, her voice had been cold and indifferent. Now, that was not all. Her current voice carried much greater solemnity than before.

A queen's majesty. The airs of an inviolable princess. The authority of a goddess—

She no longer displayed the frivolity of a girl addicted to love. Or perhaps this was actually her true nature?

Yuri's provocations seemed to have pressed a switch somewhere within the goddess.

"Such repeated insolence towards the goddess of dawn, oh how my rage seethes within me... That said, this could be considered a courageous act of a mortal girl. Fufu, as one who seeks and chases after love herself, even I am inspired to grant my blessing to such reckless behavior undertaken for the sake of love."

A calm voice.

Furthermore, the lioness' body proceeded to split apart into halves along the line of the spine.

A dark shadow emerged from the crack. Conversely, the lioness ' body turned into sand and crumbled. Then the shadow took on a woman's outline and several seconds passed.

As Godou and Yuri watched, the shadow materialized into solid form.

A beautiful girl, her figure as slender as a juniper.

One would estimate her age to be fifteen or sixteen by appearance. Her lustrous silver hair was very pretty. With long lashes belonging to a girl of one's dreams, rosy cheeks and adorable cherry lips, she was the embodiment of maidenly beauty one could never forget on first sight.

If one were to pass her by on one's way, it would not be strange to dream of her that night.

However—her arms and everything below the waist were made of brass.

Her arms, legs and lower torso were made of brass prostheses. The metal was neither armor nor divine vestments. Godou's instincts told him she was bearing wounds that would never heal.

He knew from a Campione's warrior instincts. The goddess before him was half dead.

Carrying these wounds that would never heal as she continued to exist on the earth, this half-alive, half-dead goddess—!

"The goddess of dawn... Heretic... Circe!"

Then as her breathing quickened, Yuri finally whispered the goddess' true name.

Chapter 7 - Farewell, Witch

Part 1

"Fu... How long has it been since my true visage was last exposed to a man's gaze?"

The goddess Circe spoke sonorously.

In full display, her true appearance was gorgeous beyond description.

It was not simply a matter of beauty. Godou found his gaze drawn involuntarily to her every move. Subtle changes in expression, shifts in her gaze. He felt attracted to these tiny details as if she exuded a movie star's dazzling charisma.

Holding universal attraction, she displayed everything enthralling about a young beauty's charm.

"Furthermore, even my battered body is now exposed—"

Attached to Circe's body were prosthetic arms, legs and a lower torso, all crafted from brass.

These body parts made metallic screeches as they moved.

With a slow yet flowing motion, the goddess turned as if dancing.

But Godou found himself involuntarily staring at the way she moved her body like a pure and innocent young girl.

Transcending simple outward beauty, the sight was mesmerizing. Godou was treated to a sight of the goddess Circe's intoxicating qualities as a femme fatale.

"Your body's condition... Is it really Gascoigne's doing?"

"On the verge of His Highness' departure, we had a little altercation and this was the result... Fufu, I stand as the immortal goddess of dawn. To think my body could be pushed to this extent , how truly befitting of one bearing the title of a god-slaying warrior."

The sun's divinity also carried immortal qualities. Godou recalled this fact.

Despite her condition, she did not express any resentment towards Alec and even praised him with a smile. Such composure and resilience was truly befitting for a goddess.

Nevertheless, her prostheses moved quite sluggishly as if they were very heavy.

Was it because she became wary of approaching the enemy after Ena sliced her? But why? Godou felt a strange sense of certainty.

He kept getting the feeling that this goddess, despite being sluggish in movement and on the verge of death, was not "weak."

"Kusanagi-sama. I have revealed my true visage in order to make you my captive. This battered body is on display so that these cold arms may embrace you."

The goddess' eyes were bright violet in color. Godou felt his spine shudder violently in response to her beautiful gaze.

Rather than fear, he was reacting to the attraction of Circe's mysterious charm.

"Fufu. Let me repeat myself once again. Please abandon that girl and choose me instead. Then I shall offer you love that is worthy of this wise decision!"

Courtship coming from a goddess. Unlike last time, to think it would become such a troubling situation.

Godou felt himself almost instantly captivated by Circe's irresistible charms.

Compared to this goddess of dawn, Yuri in his embrace was ultimately just an ordinary human. No matter how cute and beautiful she was, everything paled in comparison to a goddess...

However, Godou frowned, remaining unmoved.

"So this is the goddess Circe's true visage..."

Yuri whispered from within Godou's embrace. Gazing at the goddess, her face displayed unease.

Simply by feeling the warmth of Yuri's body, Godou felt his fighting spirit rise naturally.

Regardless, he felt incensed by the goddess' conspiracy to separate Yuri from him. He was also greatly displeased by her intention to defang him in this manner.

"The splendor of my true visage can be considered one of my weapons... To think you are capable of suppressing those raging feelings, how truly befitting of the god-slaying monarch."

Circe spoke cheerfully. She gave off a sense of classic elegance as suited to a transcendent goddess.

Despite the rejection of her courtship, she continued to display such composure. The feeling she gave off was clearly different from before.

"According to my initial plan, I was going to twist off an arm and a leg of yours, adding to my treasured collection. Fufu, now in compensation for all the trouble you have caused me, let me offer you even more tender loving care. I shall have all four limbs removed, eyes destroyed and your throat incinerated. Then crawling on the ground like a worm, you shall receive a goddess' loving affection!"

At the same time as her terrible declaration escaped from her adorable lips—

Godou felt a gust of wind blowing. Thanks to staying on alert, his senses was able to give an ominous warning slightly beforehand.

"Godou-san! This is the magic for stealing Verethragna's incarnations!"

Yuri also gave warning. She was probably paying attention too.

Godou raised his magical power immediately and held his breath, trying to counter the magic by preventing himself from breathing the wind. Then a dramatic change occurred immediately .

A nude girl, her body white and transparent, appeared out from the wind!

"O girl of Harpyia. Please blow into Kusanagi-sama the goddess ' incantation!"

Circe commanded the semi-transparent girl floating in midair.

In response to these orders, the "girl" twisted its body nimbly in the air. Her lips were approaching Godou's face and was probably planning to blow magic into him through a kiss.

Just as Godou was about to react while protecting Yuri, a helping hand of salvation was offered.

"O Eight Gods of the Mikannagi. In accordance to the protection of harmony, manifest tranquility!"

These were Yuri's spell words. White light emanated from the Hime-Miko's body.

This was a spell for radiating a Hime-Miko's heart of harmony by raising psychic sensing powers to the maximum. Godou had seen this technique of [Spirit Pacification] last used at Cape Inubou recently.

Bathed in the sacred light, the girl of the wind was dyed white and then vanished.

Rather than defeated, it would be more apt to say she was assimilated by Yuri's light.

"Thanks a lot, Mariya!"

"N-Not at all. Please do not mind me. Go ahead and fight as you wish."

The Hime-Miko replied to Godou's thanks, but she began to pant heavily.

The [Spirit Pacification] apparently drained her stamina drastically.

Using it to suppress a wind spirit—a goddess' minion, took quite a substantial toll. Judging from the situation, Yuri would probably exhaust her stamina and magical power in one or two more uses.

Furthermore, the Hime-Miko's trump card elicted an unexpected response from the enemy.

"A maidservant capable of suppressing me, I see... This girl seems to be quite an excellent miko. Fufu, a miko's true path lies in serving the gods after all. Then I shall make use of you a little."

The goddess Circe murmured these strange words.

Accompanied by a metallic screech, she raised her left prostheic arm and pointed a finger at Yuri.

Then her finger shot out. The index finger of brass flew straight at the Hime-Miko's throat. Leaving the goddess' hand, the finger flew like an arrow. Were it to strike on target, results would surely be fatal—!

Godou instantly sprang into action.

Turning his back towards the finger arrow, he shielded Yuri behind him.

As a result, the brass fingertip pierced him near the shoulder blade. But a Campione's body possessed excessive vitality with abnormal tenacity, which meant that he could not possibly be so fragile as to die from this level of attack—Or at least, that was how things were supposed to be.

Godou felt intense pain from his back.

This level of pain was comparable to getting stuck by Salvatore Doni's magic sword.

"What... is this?"

Furthermore, the wound felt exceptionally cold.

The inside of his body was frozen. The severe cold felt like frostbite.

Only his head felt inexorably hot, as if his brain was suffering from some giant burden, causing a thermal runaway. Strength drained from his entire body.

"G-Godou-san!? Pull yourself together, will you!?"

Come to think of it—This greatly resembled the time when Athena had blown [Death] into him.

Recalling the past battle, Godou was shocked. Why would this be similar!?

"The curse of the poisonfeather bird's toxins... Given these delicate arms of mine, I could not possibly inject this curse directly into the god-slaying monarch's body of the ancient warrior. Thus, I made use of that miko there."

I see. She must have targeted the fact that I would protect Yuri as soon as she was attacked.

Godou understood. As expected of the witch goddess, utterly ruthless and unscrupulous in her methods. Unlike Godou's past enemies which included war gods and the divine king, she used completely different tactics. Truly difficult to handle indeed.

"T-To think that making enemies out of women would be this troublesome..."

Godou could not help but mutter.

This was a comment that would probably bring about intense protests from all the girls and goddesses with whom he had ever associated. However, based on this particular aspect, the "woman" named Circe was the most challenging.

Damn it. Godou cursed in his dizziness and gritted his teeth.

Putting forth all his strength to move his icy-cold body, he strove to ignore the pain but still he could not stop his knees from collapsing. However, Yuri caught him in her arms.

She should be quite tired herself. Nevertheless, she gave Godou support the instant he was about to fall down.

Godou was the one holding Yuri earlier but now it was Yuri's turn to hold him in her arms.

"...I am very sorry. This is all because of me. However, please be patient for a little while."

Supporting Godou from falling, the Hime-Miko displayed a stern expression full of resolve.

"Very soon, I shall enable you—Godou-san—to fight with full readiness. I will surely help your body recover and prepare for you the [Sword] to slice this goddess apart!"

"M-Mariya..."

"Please allow me to address the goddess of dawn with fearful reverence. Indeed you are the divinity that embodies womanly wisdom and femininity. However."

Comporting herself with an air of nobility as befitted one bearing the "Hime" title, Yuri glared at the goddess.

"Starting from this moment, I will protect this man for now. Even if you attempt any sort of spell, goddess, I will surely repel them. I will not allow you to harm a single hair on Godou-san's head!"

Part 2

"Fufu. A girl making cute little chirps... Ahah, I am inspired with a wonderful idea. Let me transform you into a bird, to be kept lovingly in a cage."

Circe smiled leisurely in response to Yuri's declaration.

It was only natural. The difference in power level between a miko and a goddess was akin to the separation of heaven from earth.

"Come. Until you welcome death's arrival, pray entertain my aural and visual senses."

These spell words, chanted like a song, transformed into glittering sunlight akin to radiance streaming through gaps in dense foliage.

Carried by the wind, these spell words flew with shining splendor. The target in their path was obviously Yuri who was supporting the collapsed Godou.

However, the Hime-Miko's body glowed with sacred light once more. [Spirit Pacification] was the technique.

Blocked by the white light, the curse for turning humans into birds was unable to reach Yuri's body. She had barely managed to defend against the goddess Circe's magic.

However, unlike earlier, she did not succeed in dispelling the goddess' spell completely.

Glittering like scattered sunlight, the dots of light gradually surrounded Godou and Yuri, pressing closer and closer to them progressively. The only thing shielding them was Yuri's [Spirit Pacification].

However, the white glow was gradually weakening. Humans were not supposed to be able to defend against the magic of gods. Most probably, Yuri's magical power was going to be depleted in a matter of ten-odd seconds and the light of pacification would vanish along with it. Nevertheless—

Despite the poison corroding him from within, Godou did not feel anxious.

He was currently under the gaze of Yuri's eyes of sagacity. She should have known from the very start that buying ten-odd seconds of time was enough.

This was evidenced by the fact of the Hime-Miko calmly proceeding to the next action.

In Godou's weakened state, she held his face gently in her hands, brought it close to her and kissed him.

"Godou-san... I will convey to you everything about the goddess Circe, everything I have seen. The witch who made the hero Odysseus her lover and captive— Please turn this knowledge into the [Sword] for slicing apart Circe, the goddess of dawn!"

Embracing Godou tightly, Yuri pressed her lips down as she whispered.

As the images seen by the Hime-Miko began to enter Godou's mind, a vast amount of knowledge and words rushed about inside his head.

"Oooh... What utter depravity!"

Circe raised her left arm of brass towards Godou and Yuri.

Rather than a finger, she shot her entire arm from the elbow this time. Carrying the potent poison like just now, or perhaps an even more vicious attack, the arm of brass was flying towards them!

Yuri did not have any method to counter a physical attack of this sort. Just as Godou became startled...

"Also, please lend your strength to me... Please share your power with me, the one protecting you! I will show you I can become even more powerful!"

Yuri was sucking his lips forcefully.

Although the act was slightly clumsy, it allowed Godou to feel intensely Yuri's entire heart and soul that she was pouring into her kiss of love.

The Hime-Miko even inserted her tongue, contrary to previous kisses, going as far as to stir Godou's tongue vigorously, entangling the two tongues together. In that very instant—

The white glow of [Spirit Pacification] enveloping Yuri's body, on the very verge of vanishing...

The light strengthened all at once, brightly illuminating the surroundings and covering everything in a layer of pure whiteness . This intense light was several times more powerful than when she first used it.

Furthermore, this pure white light destroyed the brass arm released by the goddess.

In the instant before calamity would befall Godou and Yuri, just before it hit, the arm vanished completely.

Godou was dumbstruck. The technique of [Spirit Pacification] not only suppressed a goddess' authority but even a physical attack launched by her as well!

Naturally, this ultimate skill could not have been achieved by Yuri alone.

She was currently sucking Godou's mouth and tongue in pitiful desperation. By casting a new spell, she was able to absorb from inside Godou's body.

What she absorbed was the vast reserves of magical power that only existed in the bodies of gods and Devil King Campiones—

Yuri's absorption of magical power was now reaching quite a dangerous level. Even for a premier Hime-Miko, storing this massive amount of magical power in her body would immediately cause ill effects.

No, this amount was enough to endanger her life and cause inexorable pain.

Nevertheless, absorbing for the sake of strengthening herself, she switched to using a Campione's magical power to sustain the [Spirit Pacification] spell, forcibly enduring the pain.

Even so, her body must be suffering from immense strain...

"O carriage of dawn, now is the time to descend from the heavens, to incinerate the Devil King to oblivion!"

Scorching flames of conflagration suddenly spread out, engulfing the goddess' historic ruins.

Circe released a spell, possibly because she predicted dire consequences if Yuri was left to do as she wished. The princess femme fatale hovered into the air and looked down at the burning ruins from the sky.

However, even when standing in a vortex of flames—

Godou and Yuri's immediate surroundings remained calm and peaceful, protected by the white light.

Yuri was breathing hard but in spite of that, Godou could still clearly hear the suction noises coming from her repeated kisses on his lips in desperation.

She was most likely in great pain already. Large sweat drops beaded on her forehead while her gaze began to lose focus.

But even so, she did not seek respite, continuing to offer herself for Kusanagi Godou's sake—

Yuri performed a great number of difficult spells in rapid succession. Her energy, stamina and concentration were all approaching their limits, most likely.

This was evidenced by the change in her way of kissing. Up until this point, she had kissed passionately again and again, sustained by heightened emotions.

But now, Yuri's kisses merely sucked at Godou's lips slowly with a series of "smooch, smooch" sounds. Despite the loss of her vigor, Yuri continued to kiss him nonstop, cautiously and attentively.

With deep loving affection and earnest sincerity, she kissed Godou's lips, stirring his tongue repeatedly.

"Godou-san... This is all I can do... But I do all this for your sake. .. So—so..."

Gazing at Godou with her moistened eyes, she offered her lips to him as she whispered.

She looked as though she could hardly stand and finally collapsed. This time, it was Godou's turn to catch her.

The poison's effects had disappeared, thanks to Yuri's healing magic.

Furthermore, the forging of the [Sword] within Godou's body was complete. It could be drawn at any time now. Although they were currently surrounded by a burning inferno, there was no feeling of heat and not even a spark drifted over.

These were all part of Yuri's accomplishments. Godou hugged her delicate body tightly.

"Mari... Yuri. I am fine now, so please rest for now."

Embracing her, he whispered in her ear.

Yuri had challenged her limits in order to help Godou recover to his current state. Furthermore, he was the reason for this frail girl's currently dire condition and could do nothing but accept her offerings.

Filled with self-loathing for his uselessness, Godou hugged Yuri even tighter.

"Fufu... Do not worry. I only do this because I like it."

Yuri whispered as if she had read Godou's mind.

In addition, she was smiling blissfully, taking the crisis in stride with such an expression. Godou instantly took on Verethragna's final incarnation, the [Warrior], and chanted the spell words.

"I am the strongest, the one smashing through all enemies in my way!"

Spheres of light—the [Sword]'s spell words manifested in continuous succession in Godou and Yuri's surroundings.

Dozens, hundreds, thousands of lights floated in midair, spreading out like a sparkling galaxy. The flames of conflagration instantly disappeared with the manifestation of these spheres of light.

Still hovering in the air, Circe murmured with a stunned expression in response:

"Severing divine power..."

Then she immediately switched to a sharp expression and landed on the ground.

Her grim countenance was now unbecoming of her dream-like maidenly beauty. The goddess, who used magic as her greatest weapon, understood that the [Sword]'s arrival was quite unfavorable for her.

The witch goddess Circe from ancient Greece had deep connections with the hero Odysseus.

The spheres of light manifested here were all blades for slicing her apart—

Meanwhile, Godou had helped Yuri to sit down on the ground for she no longer had the strength to stand.

He nodded. Although she was completely exhausted, the Hime-Miko responded with a dazzling smile. Godou called out to this girl who supported him so resolutely:

"I could only get here all thanks to you. I will absolutely obtain victory, so please wait a while!"

"Yes!"

This was a rare promise of victory that Godou rarely made. Gratitude and apologies for her should be saved until after victory. Godou arranged roughly a thousand individual [Swords] around Yuri in a defensive formation before turning his gaze towards Circe.

"O scorching lightning, become the goddess' spear!"

The goddess released lightning from her hand. However, a sphere of light flew into the path of the incoming lightning and instantly dispelled it.

Seeing this, Circe frowned and glared at the many spheres of light filling the air like a galaxy.

"Using the Trojan Horse to capture the city of Troy, the hero Odysseus subsequently wandered for ten years... Along the way, he reached the island of the sun god Helios' daughter Circe. She is the terrifying witch who casts magic on those who visit her island, turning them into wild beasts!"

The golden spheres shone radiantly like a galaxy. Several thousands of light raced through the air, flying to Circe's surroundings, preparing to slice apart their target.

Unintimidated by this sword formation, Circe invoked new magic.

"O thorned one, flourishing in lush greenery!"

Thorned ivies with roses growing on them began to creep out of the ground.

Within the blink of an eye, they formed a small rose garden as Circe's protective barrier. Nevertheless, this was probably unable to stop Verethragna's [Sword].

Unfazed, Godou continued chanting spell words.

"Of course, Circe also used magic on Odysseus, intending to transform him into a beast. However, her magic did not affect the hero who was under the protection of the gods. Instead, Circe fell in love with him and became his lover!"

The [Sword] sped up and advanced towards Circe and the barrier of thorns and roses. By attacking from all directions, the thorns and roses protecting the goddess should be easily eliminated. The [Spell Words of the Sword] were blades capable of slicing through an enemy's divine power and divinity. Even things like protective powers and magic could be cut and destroyed.

"Sons of magic, soar through the sky to become my army!"

Finding the thorns ineffective, Circe used new magic.

Sliced by the [Sword] and scattered in the air, the thorned vines of ivy and the flowers of roses transformed, from long and slender plants into brass dolls equipped with spears and armor.

These brass soldiers were roughly the same size as Godou's individual [Swords]. Whizzing through the air, they flew to attack the dancing storm of [Swords].

—However.

"Ultimately, Odysseus was still enthralled by Circe's beauty and remained on her island to live there indefinitely. Having forgotten about his homeland, he was delayed by a whole year. Using her

beauty and magic to conquer heroes, weakening their power, obstructing their goals—these are the qualities of the witch goddess Circe!"

Verethragna's [Sword] sliced apart all the little soldiers, pulverizing them.

Conversely, none of the brass dolls were able to defeat a single [Sword].

Just like all past deities who had fought Godou in various ways, simply using divine power was not enough to defend against the [Sword]. However, Circe seemed clearly aware of this fact.

Suddenly, immense magical power burst forth from her body.

Compared to the amount residing in her body until now, her magical power had roughly doubled. Apparently, she had summoned the thorns and the brass dolls in order to buy enough time for accumulating this magical power.

Then Circe poured this enormous amount of magical power into spell words.

"O beast that stands as the Persian Warlord's manifestation. By the bonds of wizardry, heed my call now and come forth!"

As expected, she used it. Circe used the trump card of the "incarnations" she had stolen from Godou.

In the next instant, the ground behind Circe erupted. A certain gigantic entity blew away the stone steps of the ruins and rushed onto ground level from down below.

To Godou, this was a very familiar creature—the [Boar].

The black divine beast, twenty meters long. Due to the long summoning time required, Circe must have hidden it underground ahead of time.

Circe floated up into the air again and landed lightly on the [Boar]'s head.

Godou frowned because he understood the problematic situation.

The [Sword] for slicing through the goddess of dawn was unable to cut Verethragna's incarnation!

Part 3

"Come, divine child of the sacred warlord. Exhibit your raging spirit!"

Responding to Circe's orders, the [Boar] opened its jaws wide.

Then the familiar rumbling roars came.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
!

As usual, the roars were accompanied by shockwaves. Consequently, dozens of the wildly dancing spheres of light were blown away in the air.

Perhaps due to the sacred powers residing in the roars, the spheres of light were not simply sent flying.

The [Boar]'s attack caused roughly 30% of the [Swords] that were struck to pop like soap bubbles, disappearing in succession!

"—Manifesting justice in this world through these spell words of mine!"

Godou transmitted his thoughts to the [Sword], ordering it to attack Circe.

The cluster of golden stars, glittering in the sky, responded to his thoughts and accelerated, beginning to dance wildly.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar] emitted a thunderous roar again and blew away the [Swords] as one would scatter tiny spiders. Just as before, roughly 30% of the [Swords] were destroyed.

Yet Godou found it strange.

Carrying Circe on its head, the [Boar] displayed no intention to move.

Godou had expected it to charge ferociously as always—while feeling surprised, Godou sent a portion of the [Sword] to accelerate towards Circe.

Dozens of bright lights rushed towards the beautiful witch like a meteor shower. However, at this moment—

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar] roared again and blew away all the [Swords] flying towards its mistress. And again, a fraction of the [Swords] were destroyed.

I see. Godou understood now. The [Boar] could be thought of as Circe's castle.

Castle walls for defending her from the sword formation of spell words. Equipped with these roars, not only was the enemy in a securely fortified position, but the [Sword] could very well be destroyed completely as well.

Furthermore, all Circe needed to do was focus on defense rather than have the [Boar] attack.

"In that case, I'll have to besiege the castle for real—"

Just as Godou turned his attention to the [Sword] to launch a concentrated attack for knocking open the [Boar]'s castle gates, Circe's chanting could be heard.

"One who enacts justice, please direct me towards the light and the righteous path!"

Immediately, the black goat suddenly manifested high above Godou's head. Back to its normal size, it was hovering leisurely in the air.

Then from its body lightning was released, crashing down violently on the human directly below!

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

Screams of pain escaped Godou's mouth. The strike was powerful enough to penetrate the magical resistance that resiliently defended against even divine powers. Godou had already tasted this lightning a few days ago at the island in the demonic realm. She was using the [Goat] incarnation again!

Just like last time, the black goat exhausted its power with one lightning strike and disappeared quickly.

"She's able to use two incarnations at once huh..."

Godou had also attempted it once before, the technique of using two incarnations simultaneously.

Realizing his opponent was using that ability, Godou groaned in shock. Although the lightning left no visible injuries on the surface of his body, pain and paralysis was spreading throughout.

Even if he used the [Camel] like last time, it still would not have much of an effect.

Also, Circe continued to chant:

"Evil ones, tremble before me, the one possessing wings... My wings shall bring cursed retribution to you all!"

Despite Godou's determined intention to attack the latest incarnation using the [Sword] with reckless abandon, he was too late.

Although he could sense something flying towards him with lightning speed, Godou was neither able to dodge nor block its path using the [Sword].

His vision could not capture that level of speed—

By the time he noticed, Godou's left shoulder was already sliced open by something akin to a sharp blade.

Blood spurted out. Then an onslaught of pain arrived.

"Gu... Uh!?"

Enduring the pain, Godou looked up high to see a bird of prey resembling an eagle or a falcon, flying majestically amidst the [Sword]'s spheres of light that filled the sky.

The instant Godou discovered the bird of prey, it instantly vanished.

Godou could feel the shockwave caused by the lightning speed of its descent. Immediately, a crack suddenly appeared on a stone step in the ruins three meters away from Godou. It was a mark left behind as if dug by some sharp object.

—Divine speed!?

Seeing the bird of prey appearing in the sky again, Godou realized it was the [Raptor] incarnation.

The bird of prey had apparently used its sharp beak or claws to slice open his left shoulder just now. But just like Godou in the past, it was incapable of controlling its own excessive speed. This resulted in the poor accuracy of its attacks.

Who knew if Circe realized the same thing, for she chanted new spell words.

"O immortal sun, I beseech you to send forth dawn's horse-drawn carriage!"

Gliding in the air, the bird of prey transformed into a bronco.

Its fur was pure white. Enveloped in golden flames, this time it was the [White Stallion].

Furthermore, while all this was happening—

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!
ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!
ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The tusked, black divine beast kept producing roars with shockwaves, vigorously trying to sweep the air clean of spell words. If this continued, the [Sword]'s total destruction would only be a matter of time.

Then there was the [White Stallion] manifested in the air.

The golden flames all over its body were burning much stronger than last seen before.

The [Stallion] looked as if it had resolved itself to ignite all kindling for the purpose of incinerating Kusanagi Godou together with itself to the bitter end.

Feeling the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end, Godou knew that if he was struck by this attack, he could very well die for real—

Since the [Camel] incarnation was not currently active, Godou did not have the same resilient vitality as last time.

What should he do!? How could he fight his way out of this crisis!?

Just as Godou gnashed his teeth in the face of this challenge—

'Godou-san. Even if the [Sword] cannot slice through Verethragna's incarnations, it can still sever their connections to the goddess!'

A sudden lesson. These were thoughts transmitted through psychic sensing.

Godou glanced at the user of psychic sensing for an instant. Surrounded by the [Swords] left behind by Godou, Yuri was nodding emphatically at him from afar while she sat collapsed on the ground out of exhaustion.

Having received a spirit vision, the Hime-Miko promptly transmitted the knowledge to him.

Moreover, Godou had wielded this weapon—the [Sword]'s spell words numerous times already. He was convinced he knew very clearly how to use it to realize Yuri's suggestion.

Godou deliberately closed his eyes.

Whether the [Boar] which kept destroying [Swords] with its roars or the [White Stallion] charging towards him from the air, Godou no longer looked at them.

Compared to these two beasts, Godou had more important things to capture.

Namely, the magic itself that had turned these incarnations into Circe's possessions.

Normally, Godou was not capable of sensing that vague and ambiguous presence. Just as Erica described, he was a man with zero talent in magic. However—

It was a completely different matter when he used Verethragna's [Warrior] and [Goat] incarnations.

Whenever either of these incarnations was active, Godou was imbued with magical control surpassing all magi in order to manipulate spell words and lightning. Hence he was surely capable of seeing—

The pulsation of power. The divine power woven by the goddess Circe. The telltale signs of an authority in use, one that concealed fire attributes.

"That's it!"

The instant he perceived it, Godou opened his eyes wide.

Although the [White Stallion] overhead was falling like a burning meteor, Godou remained motionless. Instead, he gave orders to attack.

Under his directions, two beams of light flew towards separate directions.

One beam targeted the head of the [White Stallion] charging at Godou. The other flew towards the back of the [Boar], Circe's current mount.

The two lights of the [Sword] splendidly severed what Godou had seen.

These were the magically woven links that connected the incarnations to the goddess. At the same time, the [White Stallion]

collided directly with Godou's body. However, he was completely unharmed.

The [White Stallion] was reabsorbed into Godou's body. Furthermore, the violently howling [Boar] also vanished and returned to within Godou as well.

Originally riding on the black divine beast's head, Circe was tossed into the air by the loss of her mount.

Godou ordered five [Swords] to fly towards the falling witch like a meteor shower. This was in order to sever Circe's magic of [Hero Confinement], the secret art used to steal Verethragna's incarnations.

—Slice. Godou could feel slicing on target.

The five [Swords] pierced Circe's body one after another. At the same time, Godou recovered what had been stolen from him. The incarnations of the [Wind], the [Bull], the [Raptor], the [Ram] and the [Goat]—

Although he could live without these powers, they were comrades who had accompanied him through situations of life and death after all.

For this once, Godou nodded strongly to acknowledge the feeling of the incarnations' return.

"Guh! Then I call upon the wheel of dawn!"

Despite losing Verethragna's incarnations, Circe remained standing in the sky. Pointing her finger at the eastern sky, she chanted spell words.

"I implore you to become my spear for piercing the ground, incinerating all existence!"

Many stars were scattered over the South Seas' sky.

During this inappropriate time, the sun rose from the east. Circe was probably planning on unleashing her strongest fire attack on the same level as Verethragna's [White Stallion].

The glow of dawn illuminated the South Seas and the uninhabited island with a rosy tint.

Released by this sun, golden brilliance flew towards Godou on the ground. Nevertheless, Godou gave instructions to the remaining [Swords] in the air to intercept.

Several hundred spheres of light sliced apart the golden flashes, destroying them before they could reach the ground.

Even if the sun's strongest light was used as an attack, so long as it was Circe's authority, the [Sword] could cut it. That said, the blades of spell words were also diminishing in number through use.

The [Swords] Godou created were almost entirely used up for intercepting sunlight.

There were only about a hundred left—the ones Godou had ordered to form a defensive formation around Yuri. Godou turned his gaze over there and exchanged nods with Yuri.

Now was the time for switching the remaining weapons from defense to offense. Godou and Yuri were thinking the same thing simultaneously.

"Evil-doers, tremble before me! Hindrances, begone from my sight!"

Godou accelerated all the remaining [Swords] and sent them flying towards Circe. The swarm of [Swords] proceeded to mercilessly slice through her as she stood in the air.

"Kyaaaaah!?"

Circe screamed as she crashed down to earth.

Her brass prostheses also gave off breaking noises. Nevertheless , Godou's enemy was a goddess. This fall could not have caused any significant damage to her.

On the other hand, Godou had felt clearly the slicing sensation from the sword.

He had cut rather deeply into Circe's divinity. She was already carrying a half-dead and battered body. It would come as no surprise if she consumed all her strength and collapsed on the spot .

But despite this being the reasonable outcome—

"Guh..."

The goddess made herself hover using magic again.

Circe's left prosthetic arm was already lost from launching the earlier attack. Due to the damage caused by Godou's [Sword], her left prosthetic leg was greatly twisted out of shape while her waist area was also cracked severely.

Panting heavily, she no longer displayed the elegance of a beautiful girl from fantasy.

She was literally covered with wounds. Nevertheless, Circe still floated up into midair, casting her haughty gaze down at the god-slayer who had pushed her this far. Her beautiful face and sharp glare exuded unyielding vigor.

She still intended to fight, resolved to defeat Godou by any means necessary, so as to treasure him like a toy in the exact manner she had declared.

However, perhaps due to a Campione's animal-like instincts regarding battle...

Godou still sensed that Circe was lying on death's door. She was currently about to collapse. Victory would be obtained simply by landing a blow or two on her—Godou was convinced.

But in the face of imminent defeat, Circe smiled instead.

"Fufufu. As expected, this body prevented the situation from developing favorably. In that case, I have no choice but to risk all on a gamble."

A blue shadow manifested behind her, floating in midair.

It was an ambiguous humanoid silhouette with a poorly defined outline. Clad in armor, an angular impression was exuded all over. Standing roughly five meters tall, its height was not impressive enough to call it a giant.

Then there were the steel bow and arrows—Familiar weapons Godou had seen before.

This was the being that Circe had called the "divine spirit of the bow." Using the [Warrior]'s ability to obtain deep understanding of target deities, Godou was able to see past his true nature.

"This guy is the power you stole from Odysseus, right?"

Godou spoke as he looked up at the figure and Circe.

The authority to "strip hero's of their power using beauty and magic." Odysseus was the hero who possessed this power of bow and arrows and was also intimately linked to the goddess.

Her ability to use a portion of his powers was not surprising. However.

"Although probably stronger than divine beasts, I can't see him as a match for us."

Godou spoke as he cast his eyes of the [Warrior] at the bow-wielding figure.

Ultimately, this "divine spirit of the bow" was merely an imitation of Odysseus. An existence possessing an ego on the level of a divine beast but lacking a human's mind and intelligence.

Godou did not think he could become Circe's trump card in her desperate situation—

"Yes, it is exactly as you say. Please feel free to mock the superficiality of a desperate woman. I plan on using this to cast my final magic."

Final? Just as Godou frowned in response to these dangerous words—

Circe suddenly stabbed her remaining right arm prosthesis into her left breast. The sharp fingertips of brass dug into white and tender flesh, resulting in a spurt of fresh blood!

While Godou watched dumbfounded, Yuri also gasped and went "Hmm!?" in the distance.

The beautiful goddess' fingertips were stabbed where a human's heart would be located. Blood gushed out like a geyser but the flow soon stopped. This was a most bizarre move on her part.

"By this crimson blood I swear upon heaven and earth. Should I fail to vanquish Kusanagi Godou in this trial of magic, I shall personally put an end to my immortal life!"

What!? Godou was rendered speechless. Circe's declaration was filled with spell words.

This was a curse. A coersive curse the goddess had cast upon herself. She had no choice but to do this in order to realize her goal —

What a truly absurd curse this was!?

But in the next instant, Circe's magical power expanded several fold!

This level of power was comparable to that of Godou's past enemy, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, when he summoned Zhu Ganglie and Vaisravana. Godou was reminded of what his beautiful sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, had informed him before.

A deity's strength was directly proportional to the intensity of their ego, obsessions and sense of identity!

"I see... Swearing to defeat me with your last and only magic, even going as far as to bind yourself with a curse—you have elevated the motivating element of 'defeating me' to the maximum! "

Godou trembled in response to his beautiful foe's cunning plan.

He now realized clearly what prompted his sense of unease before the battle. The reason why he did not find this goddess, on the very verge of death, "weak" at all. It now made perfect sense logically, she was terrifying precisely because she was wounded.

Because she was so close to death, Circe did not cherish life.

Hence, she was able to lay everything on the line for the sake of defeating Kusanagi Godou, converting her life into a weapon even if the price was its forfeit. She even went as far as to make this task her greatest and only identity!

...The goddess of dawn, Circe, began to chant loudly.

Using her immortal life as a price to obtain magical power, her goal was to release her final magic.

"Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy."

Godou realized the true nature of Circe's magic. Indeed, it was that poem!

"His guile and brilliance recognized by the people on earth, his renown even reached the heavens. His name is—"

Odysseus!

While the goddess chanted and Godou nodded, in that very instant—

The bow-wielding figure—the "divine spirit of the bow" which was only a black shadowy mass, suddenly obtained a material body. A warrior fully armed with bronze armor, a steel bow and steel arrows.

He stood five meters tall or so. Circe landed lightly on his left shoulder.

"A subordinate god huh..."

'The hero Odysseus was definitely not the goddess Circe's subordinate... Perhaps he should be more aptly called an allied god.'

Yuri whispered in Godou's ear using psychic sensing.

Then accompanied by a massive crash that shook the earth, Odysseus landed on the ground.

His left shoulder carried Circe while he wielded in his right hand the weapon of the "Pan-Eurasian hero," the bow of steel. The helmet's face was pulled down deeply, obscuring his true face.

Nevertheless, Godou was certain that Odysseus was glaring at him with great hostility.

"Is this guy the strongest steel? The one who manifests at the end of eras?"

'—No, the hero Odysseus does not appear to carry the traits of the [War Gods of Steel]. Nevertheless, I can sense astounding power coming from that bow. Please be careful, Godou-san!'

Perhaps because spirit vision showed her the formidable abilities of this user of the blue bow, Yuri's voice seemed to be trembling slightly.

But then again, since he was not a member of [Steel], Odysseus likely did not possess their troublesome abilities of " indestructibility."

Godou took delight in this particular point then turned his glare towards the wandering hero.

Part 4

"As the descendant of the great god Zeus, the indomitable hero Odysseus hereby arrives unannounced! I beseech the gods to hear me and bear witness! Please carefully observe my wit and guile, that which descends upon the earth again after eons of absence!"

A deep, sonorous voice was heard from the bronze helmet.

A rich desire to show off combined with a talkative manner of speech. Nevertheless, his words were not objectionable.

Odysseus was famous for coming up with the "Trojan Horse" ploy. He was the wandering hero, not only valorous and cunning but also an eloquent orator. This sort of man would not give others an impression of boring rigidity.

However, the summoner Circe proclaimed to the talkative giant soldier of bronze.

"Your Highness Odysseus. Our reunion greatly pleases me... But please wait a while, for this place is my battlefield!"

This announcement's effect was akin to inserting a key into Odysseus' vocal cords.

In the next instant, out from the bronze helmet came nothing but groans rather than human speech.

Goooohhhhhhhhhg!

This resembled a monster's howls more than a hero's cries. Listening to this howl with a satisfied expression as she sat on Odysseus' left shoulder, Circe nodded with a smile on her face.

She probably believed that so long as a hero was valorous, wit and eloquence were redundant.

"Well, I guess men pretty much all look like that in front of women..."

Feeling slightly sympathetic for the hero, Godou could not help but let his true feelings escape.

But of course, he still remained highly vigilant. Since Odysseus was giving off an exceptionally strong aura of killing intent, there was no room for carelessness.

"Your Highness, please use your bow to annihilate Kusanagi-sama!"

Goooohhhhhhhhhg !

In response to Circe's command, Odysseus began to shoot.

Nocking a steel arrow onto the steel bow, he drew the bowstring to its maximum limit. But instead of Godou, the arrowhead was aimed at the South Seas' starry sky.

Whoosh! The steel arrow was shot, accompanied by the bowstring's sound, disappearing into the darkness of the night sky .

Then a rain of arrows immediately descended from the sky above!

Numerous arrows of blue-white light rained down upon the island like a meteor shower. The arrows most likely numbered in the tens of thousands.

The massive number of arrows fell down upon every corner of the island.

This was literally a rain of arrows. There was no place to run at all. If one were to stand there helplessly, dozens of arrows would pierce the body instantly—

"Damn it!"

Cursing away, Godou invoked the [Raptor] incarnation.

This was the ability of divine speed only available when confronted with a high speed attack. From Godou's perspective, the pouring rain of arrows moved as if under slow motion playback. Meanwhile, he could travel at lightning speed.

In order to evade all the arrows, this was the only incarnation he could use. There was no other choice.

Running with divine speed, Godou picked up Yuri in his arms while she gazed speechlessly at the sky and cautiously dodged each arrow of light falling from the sky, one at a time.

Not only for himself, but also for the sake of protecting Yuri.

After all the arrows were finally evaded did he switch off divine speed.

"G-Godou-san. Thank you!"

"It's coming again. Although I will be swinging you around for a while, please endure for now."

Just as Yuri answered "Very well!", Odysseus had already moved on to his next shot.

Shot from the steel bow this time was not an arrow but a beam of blue-white light. Godou switched on divine speed once more and jumped to evade the light flying towards him like a laser.

However, the bombardment of light did not end there.

The blue hero shifted horizontally the light coming from the steel bow as one would sweep a spear.

Then Odysseus yelled. Goooohhhhhhhhhg!

"In that case, I'll have to go up!"

Godou jumped up to evade the horizontally sweeping spear of light.

This was all thanks to the exceptionally light and agile body conferred by the [Raptor]. Feeling weightless even when carrying a load, Godou was able to dodge the light beam even when carrying Yuri.

However, Odysseus then turned the steel bow towards Godou and Yuri who were high up in the air.

In turn, the spear of light jumped up accordingly!

Godou and Yuri were now transitioning to freefall after the jump. Since one must eventually fall after leaping upwards, there

would be no way of evading the spear. Nevertheless, Godou " decelerated" his rate of descent.

Slowly, slowly, they fell at a rate of roughly one millimeter per second.

This rate of descent was almost like hovering motionless in midair. The [Raptor] was not only capable of acceleration but also unprecedented deceleration of this sort.

During this time, the spear of light below them had already swept past and missed.

After evading the spear, Godou accelerated again, bringing Yuri with him to land on the ground.

Turning off divine speed, Godou breathed heavily. As expected of the bow-wielding hero, it was clear that subsequent arrows could not be dodged so easily. Godou was convinced that although he could rely on divine speed to evade, sooner or later he would be hit.

Furthermore, prolonged use of the [Raptor] would produce severe pain in his heart, followed swiftly by immobilization of the body through paralysis.

Godou and Yuri were fast approaching the time limit.

"In the end, we still can't proactively decide the battle..."

Godou's lips twisted involuntarily. Although grotesque in form, he was still smiling.

Although Godou had cursed "Damn it!" just before using the [Raptor], he already expected this eventual development. He had to perform an attack to defeat Odysseus and Circe together while using the [Raptor] at the same time.

In that case, there was only one choice. But this required his companion's assistance—

"I have no objections, Godou-san."

"Excellent intuition. Did you see it through spirit vision?"

"No, but it occurred to me as soon as I saw your expression, Godou-san. Fortunately, there are no others on this island to cause trouble to, so let me assist you!"

Once again, the two of them were going to unsheathe the uncontrollable "black blade"—

With a stern expression, the Hime-Miko consented to Godou's spontaneous and reckless plan.

'But wouldn't it cause great trouble to you?'

Godou refrained from asking this question. Instead, he released Yuri from his arms and set her down.

"If I accidentally blow this island away like last time, we'll just have to continue drifting on the sea without a boat, let's go!"

"Very well. And just like Odysseus, we will surely return to our homeland!"

Having obtained Yuri's support, Godou summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The three-foot-three-inch, grand, black sword suddenly manifested in his hand. After being used as the medium for the " black blade," Godou's "partner" had succumbed to a "fragile" state. That was how intensely draining the technique was.

Since a while earlier, Godou had started pouring magical power into the divine sword.

In preparation for this situation, he had already begun doing so before the battle. Now he intended to activate the divine sword temporarily. Feeling that it was about time, he drew out the sword from his right arm and—

'Wait, king. Rather than attempting that troublesome magical technique, why don't you choose a different method? The tides of battle will turn favorable very shortly.'

The divine sword's sudden advice gave Godou quite a surprise.

But he instantly understood the message. Beside him, Yuri was gazing up into the night sky with a delighted expression. Blue light was flying towards the island—Indeed, it was Liliana's flight magic.

Several seconds later, Liliana, Erica and Ena finally landed before Godou and Yuri.

"Looks like we are just in time for the most spectacular scene!"

Naturally, this relaxed tone of voice belonged to Erica. As Godou figured the reason why they came to meet up at this particular moment, Ena nodded with a smile.

"Ena sensed Ama no Murakumo recover its consciousness earlier. Feeling a presence that seemed to be traceable, Ena asked Liliana-san to explore the direction indicated."

"Luckily, we were already nearby, out at sea exploring the surrounding waters."

Liliana explained. Godou was glad to see her usual, serious attitude again. The silver-haired knight stared at the bow-wielding archer of bronze.

"The hero Odysseus... And the lovely-haired Circe? This is the goddess' true identity!?"

Inspired with spirit vision, Liliana murmured the goddess' name.

Erica and Ena tensed their expression as a result. Although the trio had just arrived, they were already prepared to battle at any moment. Truly quick on the uptake.

...Or rather, this was apparently the result of undergoing many trials in the company of Kusanagi Godou.

In any case, the arrival of these reinforcements was more uplifting than anything. Since his companions were here, Godou did not need to risk drifting away anymore—

Godou instantly cast his gaze down to turn his attention to the issue of his heart.

His usage time of divine speed had clearly increased substantially compared to before. Although it was not his intention , this apparently stood as evidence of his growth and development as a Campione.

Furthermore, Godou was struck by a firm belief regarding the [Raptor] incarnation.

The pain and paralyzing stiffness could be eliminated if he switched incarnations at this juncture—!

Nodding to Yuri, Godou halted the spell of the blade.

"Everyone, can I rely on you all to handle Odysseus' arrows briefly? Even a minute would be good enough. I will snipe the goddess during this time!"

Godou stabbed Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi into the ground as he spoke.

Ena immediately pulled out the divine sword and caressed the blade's body with her hand. The red and blue knights also summoned their favorite magic swords immediately.

All preparations were complete. Godou chanted spell words with nothing to fear.

"For victory, hasten forth before me. O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion!"

Circe had defended against and even made full use of the [White Stallion] incarnation before.

However, the goddess was currently all covered in wounds and had little excess magical power. The situation was different from last time!

"O stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bringest forth the halo of thy master—"

"Guh... Your Highness Odysseus, please grant me your protection!"

The sun rose in the eastern sky once again.

This time it was Godou using the flames of the rising sun as a weapon. The spear of flashing white light approached.

The target being sniped was Circe, the goddess on the verge of death, sitting on the left shoulder of the archer clad in bronze armor. But this time, she did not have the vortex of light she used for absorbing the [White Stallion] in the past.

As the price for summoning the hero, Circe was no longer able to use magic.

Instead, she had to let Odysseus, the shooter of magical projectiles, intercept the approaching [White Stallion] with his steel bow.

Goooohhhhhhhhhg!

Odysseus held steel bow before him as a shield, treating it as the sacrifice for the [White Stallion].

A frontal clash between the hero with the steel bow and the heavenly horse that transported the sun—

Godou infused his remaining magical power into the [White Stallion], trying to overwhelm his opponent. Odysseus in turn focused his magical power into his left hand and the steel bow to withstand the attack.

Nevertheless, Godou sensed through his instincts that he would prevail in this frontal clash.

Odysseus was a heroic god, but unlike Circe, he was not a sun god. Under the super high temperatures of the sun, his steel weapon and bronze armor were already melting gradually into a viscous state.

Godou was going to win provided he continued to sustain the [White Stallion] like this. However, the hero of the bow made another move.

Goooohhhhhhhhhg!

Odysseus opened his right hand and pointed it at Godou.

Then from each of his five fingertips, a massive steel arrow shot out—a total five arrows all at the same time. It was like firing bullets using the fingertips as gun barrels.

Five steel arrows. Normally, these would have pierced five holes in Godou's body. However.

"Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city!"[26]

"And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses!"[27]

The red and blue knights used the smiting spell words to defend.

Erica used her barb lance while Liliana used her sacred sword of extermination that had taken the form of a glaive. Together, the two weapons formed an X-shape and generated a magical shield in front of Godou and his companions. The power that protected the two sacred exterminators had now become a barrier for protecting the five of them!

This protective shield managed to just barely deflect Odysseus' five arrows.

The two knights' skills were astounding. However, the arrows shooting from the hero's right hand were not finished.

Like a machine gun, Odysseus' five fingers shot arrows of steel continuously.

More accurately this was not a hail of bullets but a second "rain of arrows." Godou decided he must defeat Circe before the knights ' defenses gave way—

Just as Godou turned his attention towards the [White Stallion] —

Ena suddenly charged forward, taking Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi with her and leaving Erica and Liliana's magical shield. Lowering her center of gravity, Ena rushed towards Odysseus like a wolf.

"Leave it to us, Your Majesty!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword hollered as she ran. In addition, Godou received the thoughts of the partner, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

By the time Godou found out what the divine sword and its user were intending, Ena had already rushed towards the rain of arrows as quickly as if she were flying.

...Just several days ago, she had used divine possession to the maximum limit without regard for her body.

Even if she had already rested and saved up her energy, the time she could fight at maximum strength should be quite short. However, Godou already knew the strategy these "two partners" were using to overcome this disadvantage.

Then just as Odysseus' arrows were about to pierce Ena in multiple places—

Ena called out loudly.

"I call upon you whose interests I shoulder, the name of Kusanagi Godou! Let us guide the summons of wind into the secret sword, for I shall turn it into Your Highness' blade!"

The calling of his name by someone facing a deadly crisis. This was the condition for using Verethragna's first incarnation, the [Wind], thereby allowing Kusanagi Godou to fly to the caller's location.

And now, Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi intended to summon this incarnation.

But now was not the time for Godou to stop the [White Stallion] . For the second time after the battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Godou employed two incarnations simultaneously again after so long.

While using the sun's shining light to pin down Circe and Odysseus, he used another incarnation at the same time.

Rather than for flying instantly to Ena's side, this was for letting Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi absorb the [Wind] incarnation!

"Guh—!"

Godou gritted his teeth from the splitting headache.

But it no longer hurt as much as last time. This also testified to Godou's growth as a Campione, gradually mastering Verethragna's authority bit by bit, strengthening his power.

After obtaining the [Wind]'s power, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and Ena turned into a storm in the shape of a human and a sword.

Boom!

With a vortex of wind swirling around her, Ena rushed forward just as the pouring rain of arrows were about to pierce her body.

By the next instant, she had already reached the side of Odysseus who was engaging the [White Stallion].

Her speed was truly like the wind—Her running speed could already be described as instantaneous teleportation.

Then Ena swung Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and attacked twice.

First she severed Odysseus' right arm at the elbow, eliminating the hand that kept shooting rains of arrows continuously. Then in her follow through, Ena amputated the left arm at the shoulder, the one holding the gradually melting steel bow that was blocking the [White Stallion]'s flames.

Conserving her momentum, Ena continued to run forward, passing Odysseus from the side.

Were she to stop moving, the [White Stallion]'s flames would surely devour her as well.

Having absorbed the [Wind], Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi granted its user, Ena, speed like the wind and destructive power like a hurricane.

This was the very instant when Ena obtained the [Sword of Wind] that even surpassed divine possession, the trump card of the Hime-Miko of the Sword.

As for Odysseus, who had lost both arms—

He was helplessly pierced by the [White Stallion] in the left shoulder and blown away strongly.

Then Circe screamed from her seat on his shoulder.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?"

The goddess of dawn finally suffered the [White Stallion]'s direct hit.

Part 5

The wandering hero, Odysseus.

Just as Yuri pointed out, he was not supposed to be a member of indestructible [Steel].

But perhaps he really was as "indomitable" as he claimed. Despite having lost both arms and even part of his left shoulder, Odysseus still struggled desperately to stand up.

Nevertheless, this action was interrupted halfway.

The heroic figure, clad in bronze armor, gradually rarefied, finally turning transparent and disappeared.

Rather than dying, his body could no longer be maintained on earth because his summoner's strength and magic were depleted.

But this might actually be quite an astounding feat.

Odysseus was able to exist on his last breath until just now, probably because Circe remained barely alive.

"I'm sorry... This counts as my win, right?"

Godou turned his gaze downwards towards the dying goddess.

He had not let victory go to his head but was simply speaking intentionally in a calm tone of voice.

Circe's brass prosthetics were all smashed beyond recognition, incinerated into pitch-black charcoal. An incomparably tragic sight .

Yet Circe's own body of flesh remained so pristinely white and beautiful.

She was lying on the ground, breathing heavily. Large beads of sweat were flowing down her dream-like, beautiful face that displayed clear signs of pain. Rather than falling in battle, her appearance was better described by analogy to a tragic young beauty who had succumbed to fatal illness.

Even when lying on death's door, she still exhibited her beauty in a manner most suited to her.

Godou was astounded by this truly witch-like mystery and miracle. But perhaps it was related to the [White Stallion] that was used as the decisive blow. It was only natural that the attack from the horse responsible for carrying the sun would have limited effects on a sun goddess.

Nevertheless, this damage should be enough to bring about the goddess' complete death.

"Godou, please note that giving her a quick end at this time would be considered a form of mercy."

Watching quietly behind him, Erica interjected.

Yuri, Liliana and Ena were standing slightly further away, watching the end of the battle as a trio.

Godou felt that Erica's suggestion did not carry her usual nuance of telling him to "defeat the deity to obtain power." Instead, these were words of knightly pride coming from a warrior accustomed to life and death on the battlefield. Her expression was quite praiseworthy.

Godou could understand the reason.

But indeed, the goddess Circe was different from his past enemies such as Athena and Lancelot. Furthermore, Godou felt that the lawless English guy was partially responsible for Circe's current predicament...

Godou spoke to the goddess.

"Hey, you gods can live secluded in places like the Netherworld , right? How about you head there while you're still on your last breath?"

This seemed to be the most peaceable resolution of a battle between a god-slayer and a deity.

However, Circe smiled at him in a dreamy and beautiful manner.

"Fufu... Kusanagi-sama, you are really quite naive to make such a suggestion to a goddess you have defeated, despite being a god-slaying monarch. It is a delightful gesture coming from you as a man, but as a warrior, it is quite worrying..."

Godou could not help but scratch his head to find a dying goddess worrying about him. Circe then continued:

"Also, have you forgotten? Before I challenged you, my dear, I swore an oath of magic. It was going to be either victory or my death..."

"I still remember. But if you travel to a place like the great spiritual realm, perhaps you could escape that fate?"

"Well yes, were I to abandon my material body at this time to exist purely as a soul, perhaps— Although seeking refuge in the Netherworld in such a manner exists as a possible solution, that I do concede... Upon my pride as a goddess, I only wish to fulfill the meaning of life and death."

Nearing her death, the witch goddess spoke words of enlightenment.

If only she had reached this level of enlightenment earlier, then Godou could have avoided the need to oppose her in this manner.

Godou sighed. He had been very angry before the fight, completely unable to forgive her for what she intended to do to Yuri. But apart from that, he could let everything else slide.

After all, he had responded quite excessively in turn.

"To me, this is already 'an eye for an eye.' I'd say we're even now."

"Such incomparable absurdity is truly befitting of a god-slaying monarch. But unfortunately, half of my life as a deity was already taken by His Highness Alexandre. If only this half of a body is used as a sacrifice, the [Annulus of Usurpation] belonging to that joke of a witch probably won't come into play..."

"Hmm? What are you talking about?"

Ignoring Godou's question, the goddess slowly closed her eyes.

"Ah yes, but then again, you still possess that blade, Kusanagi-sama... In that case, there is meaning in sacrificing this battered body of mine... Listen carefully—Will you? Do not feel too depressed. By the life remaining in this half of a body, I, Circe, shall surely follow you, Kusanagi-sama..."

With her eyes remaining closed, she continued but Godou could not comprehend her words.

"Black blade... White— One day, these shall become the weapons you wield to form a cross... Fufu, I can already see it, Kusanagi-sama..."

"Hey, are you still okay!?"

Godou raised his voice, worried that Circe's final moments had arrived.

Then Circe slowly opened her beautiful eyes of bright violet and exhaled weakly.

"I am very sorry, Kusanagi-sama. I am already determined to offer my life as nourishment to the man with whom I have spent loving moments together..."

"Who is this man you love?"

"Of course I am referring to you, my dear Kusanagi-sama."

"No, that's totally not the kind of relationship we have!"

Godou protested loudly against the goddess who had finally turned back into a girl in love.

Unfortunately, he was not the kind of person who could pretend to be her lover at a time like this.

"Fufufufu. For a woman like me, this rustic simplicity is quite cute, you know?"

Circe, who was smiling at the sight of Godou's panic, should be the one described as cute instead.

If only this goddess could have acted in this manner from the very start, then things would not have come to this.

Godou sighed again.

"Ah yes, let me take these final moments to enact my vengeance on His Highness Alexandre for betraying my love. Regarding the great hero whom he seeks, you should search the Argo's genealogy if his true name is what you desire. I reveal this secret only to you alone, Kusanagi-sama!"

While the goddess Circe recounted these words, an adorable smile remained on her face.

Then immedidately, a strange sound of collapse came from her body. This was probably due to the curse she had placed on herself , most likely the sound of heart failure.

In the next instant, Circe's body turned into sand and collapsed.

"To think it'd be the Argo?"

"The ship that carried the band of heroes led by the renowned Jason... That ship used to find the golden fleece?"

Erica and Liliana began to discuss the goddess' last words.

On the other hand, Godou was experiencing an indescribable feeling. Despite clearly knowing the answer to the mystery Alexandre Gascoigne sought, this goddess kept completely silent about it throughout the time she spent together with that man.

Godou was truly overwhelmed with the conclusion that "women are scary indeed..."

But he did not say it aloud in fear of being overheard by the surrounding girls.

In actual fact, Yuri happened to have walked over to his side at this very moment.

"Godou-san, you have worked very hard. At the very least, we are all gathered here and reunited, safe and sound."

"Yeah, I owe a lot to your care this time, Mariya. Thank you."

Godou expressed his sincere thanks to the Hime-Miko who was comforting him with a gentle smile.

But this elicited an unexpected response instead. Yuri stared at him with an expression as if she wanted to say something.

"M-Mariya?"

"....."

Silence continued. She seemed to be seeking something, that was what her gaze conveyed. Godou was then struck by a sudden realization.

Perhaps back when he was immersed completely in the fight, Godou had naturally used "that way of addressing her." But now, he had switched back to the old manner of address, contrary to her request.

Realizing the situation, Godou was about to go "Yu—" but could not bring himself to say it.

Addressing her so intimately by given name made him feel very embarrassed. Seeing him unable to voice it, Yuri hung her head sadly.

Godou frantically tried to speak her name again but it proved to be unexpectedly difficult. Seeing Godou muttering away because he was unable to say it, Yuri smiled with a chuckle.

"It is fine to use the old way for now. Just use the easiest way to address me."

Feeling the grace of her merciful understanding, Godou went " Mariya..." and hung his head.

To think he would anger her on a matter like this, he really was quite useless.

"However, if you continue to do that without changing your ways, my patience will run out eventually, you know? Please prepare yourself accordingly, yes?"

Godou could not do anything but nod in response to this reasonable request. At this very moment—

He suddenly felt it. A feeling as though a great weight was placed on his back for a fleeting instant.

"Godou-san, that was the goddess Circe's—"

Yuri was dumbfounded. She probably saw what had just entered Godou's body.

"Power... Something similar to that has entered me... But will it become my new authority?"

"Y-You mean...?"

"That goddess seemed to be half dead and in an incomplete state. If that's the case, what is going to happen?"

Although he was puzzled, Godou did not really care as much as his questions suggested.

He would be quite troubled if he increased these ridiculous powers that ran counter to his pacifism. If he did not gain a new authority, all the better.

Speaking of which, quite a fair amount of time had passed since defeating Lancelot.

Why had he not felt the gain of an authority? While he was pondering over this—

Erica, Liliana and Ena had already arrived by his side. Looking at Godou and Yuri, the trio began a strange conversation.

"Seriously, there's a unique mood hanging over just the two of them. It really feels like something was already accomplished. Looks like we'd better check carefully, just as Erica-san suggested."

Ena spoke with what appeared to be a worried expression.

Liliana responded in a worried tone of voice:

"Since Mariya Yuri is the one he drifted out at sea together, one could not be too optimistic... Indeed, given they were spending time together with just the two of them, combined with the suspension bridge effect, clearly the matter cannot be ignored..."

"I've already said it before. Yuri is unexpectedly someone who easily goes with the flow. More surprisingly, she's also quite a passionate person. In light of the need to confirm all our respective positions right now, an interrogation is unavoidable."

"I-Interrogation?"

Godou frowned in response to Erica's mentioning of such an unsettling term.

Hearing Erica's proposal, Yuri also interjected frantically.

"E-Excuse me! After hearing everyone speak, it feels like some kind of problem between me—and Godou-san is being insinuated!?"

"No, Mariya Yuri. You are not the one to judge whether there is a problem. We three will be the ones to do that."

"I sincerely hope that you two could report in utmost detail what has happened during the time you spent together alone. Based on this report, we shall conduct the interrogation."

Following up on Liliana's stern declaration, Erica also used a rare tone of voice lacking in her customary elegance.

Even Ena looked up at the night sky with great intensity of feeling and said:

"A while back when everyone was talking about whose home to invite His Majesty to, Ena never expected it would end up as Yuri's sole victory. I suppose one could call this a greed-less victory."

"E-Ena-san. It is fortunate enough for everyone to be reunited safe and sound. Please do not talk about strange things like who won or lost, okay!?"

"Th-That's right. Basically, isn't it ludicrous to start discussing with the assumption that 'there is something'?!"

"Please keep your mouth shut, Godou. Indeed, you are normally harmless as a gelding. At least, basically."

Erica spoke with an expression as if she were a solemn and composed queen in the process of impeaching a traitor.

"Nevertheless, you tend to exhibit unforeseen explosive power on occasion, is that not the case? Hence this is basically a similar case. Our intention is to simply confirm if any exceptional situation arose. Please accept your interrogation obediently."

This was the night when the five comrades finally reunited, safe and sound.

The sky was filled with myriad stars. The island was surrounded by the South Seas' deep-blue waters. A literally open and dramatic location. Without any place to run.

In actual fact, after calm consideration, Godou realized he had not actually done anything unaccountable.

Nevertheless, when questioned about what the two of them had been doing alone together over those two days, Godou and Yuri inexplicably entered an alarming state of panic—

Epilogue

The new year had just begun not too long ago.

Alexandre Gascoigne was currently located in Portugal's ancient capital of Coimbra.

His latest efforts were directed towards obtaining "a missionary's journal dating back to the Age of Exploration when a certain heretical monk had recorded his activities in various parts of Madagascar, engaged in heinous acts defiling God."

Going through several plans in his head, he strolled along a quiet street in the ancient capital at night.

A phone call suddenly arrived. Checking the LCD screen, he discovered it was an old acquaintance—the witch he had run into roughly one month ago.

"How nice of you to call expressly this time, Lucretia. But surely you do not intend to engage in idle chitchat. State your matter concisely."

'Hohoho. I offer you my greetings, Your Highness the Prince.'

Lucretia's answer could be heard from the phone.

'However, since you put it that way, I shall dispense with the chitchat. Let me cut straight to the matter. I am actually concerned about the latest news the Princess brought back from the Far East.'

The matter. She likely meant the "King of the End." Alec nodded .

'The goddess Circe, who once shared an intimate relation with Your Highness several years ago, has died by Kusanagi Godou's hand. Reportedly, the goddess used her last strength to summon the hero Odysseus in an attempt to corner the young man... But she failed so close to her goal and finally passed away.'

"...Oh."

'Through this battle, it is readily apparent that Odysseus is not the 'King of the End.'"

Alec reawakened vivid memories dating to several years past.

Odysseus. The heroic god he recently mentioned as having a " 35% chance."

Alec was intending to investigate him thoroughly when he discovered the 'sleeping goddess.' The witch goddess Circe who had trapped the wandering hero for a year. A [Heretic God] who had apparently remained in slumber for centuries.

'By my speculation, Your Highness the Black Prince awakened the goddess Circe for the purpose of discerning the truth about the hero Odysseus, am I correct? Your goal was to obtain information about him. Hoho, even if Your Highness went as far as to make a highly unusual proposal of "Would you like to search for Odysseus together with me?" to her, I would not be surprised.'

Alec frowned. It felt like Lucretia had seen through the truth.

His bringing Circe to the South Seas to revive her was, of course , a part of his explorations.

He had awakened the goddess, who possessed a deep connection to Odysseus, on a land where traces of the "King of the End" had been discovered. This would surely bring his journey of demystifying the Devil King-exterminating hero's identity to an entirely new playing field—

However, the "experiment" concluded with unexpected results.

The awakened goddess quickly discovered Alec despite his efforts to conceal himself. Furthermore, she began to cling to him annoyingly for some unfathomable reason, always speaking like some kind of delusional girl, even going as far as to attempt imprisoning Alec using magic.

In the beginning, Alec accommodated her as appropriate but quickly grew tired of it. After maybe the fourth day of saying "I love you," he immediately fled from the goddess. Soon after he ran , it developed into an altercation. Finally, Alec used his labyrinth authority on the island he had created together with Circe and succeeded in imprisoning her.

Recalling these unhappy memories, Alec naturally put on a bitter face.

'I never expected such a colorful and heroic saga from Your Highness the Prince, who has never been the subject of salacious rumors.'

"Really? I, on the other hand, find nothing colorful about it."

'As expected of Your Highness the Prince. Still the same old in this regard, even Italian boys in elementary school are better than you.'

The witch's last comment was a sincere exclamation, carrying no sarcasm at all.

Alec clicked his tongue disapprovingly and changed the unpleasant topic.

"By the way, since Odysseus is not the 'King of the End,' then in that case..."

'Oh? Did you think of something? I would be most grateful if you would enlighten me free of charge. Just as you already know, I too, once took part in the search for that king. Hence I would be rather interested.'

"Nothing much, it's just a spontaneous idea."

Alec shrugged in response to Lucretia's request.

"The image of the wandering Pan-Eurasian hero who often displays his valor through the bow and arrows... Yet the hero who fits this description best, Odysseus, is definitely not a god with [

Steel] characteristics. Nevertheless, given the case, I think the following possibility can be established."

Without any pretense, Alec simply explained the possibility he had once suspected in the past.

"Simultaneously possessing [Steel] traits and the characteristics of the wandering Pan-Eurasian hero... The 'King of the End' must be a hybrid like that."

'I see, so that runs completely contrary to the notion of purebloodedness. If that really is the case...'

"Yeah. If one were to carefully trace forwards and backwards from the pedigree of the hero Odysseus, the chance of finding the ' King of the End' should be substantial. That's what I believe."

Naturally, this was nothing more than speculation.

But after saying it out loud, Alec somehow found his argument more compelling than first imagined.

Afterword

Hello everyone, it's been a while.

This series finally reaches its thirteenth volume, and even rarer still, an anime adaptation...

I originally thought it would happen much later.

This is all thanks to every reader's loving support. Let me express my outmost thanks to everyone here.

Well then, this time we have a volume advertising a vacation story.

Even the heroine who is always training in the mountains gets to enter the stage from the very beginning.

The content is fully packed with hot springs, the beach, camping and other leisure activities. Oh well, whether the characters themselves were able to relax, who knows? (wry smile)

Then there is this series' oft-mentioned great hero whose true name is unknown.

New keywords have been disclosed to allow everyone to seek his true visage. These keywords can be used to further narrow down the search range.

Perhaps those of you who enjoy myths and other stories might be able to use these clues to confirm a probable target.

'It's not like this is a series based on solving mysteries, isn't it about time to say the answer?'

Because that's what I think, I have decided to reveal the solution to the riddle in the near future. Everyone, if a character appearing in the future really does match the name you predicted, it would be wonderful if you make an MR-style exaggerated pretense of surprise while going "N-No, it can't be~!?"

Furthermore, this time is another round for a certain heroine.

It goes without saying for Erica and Ena, but even Liliana happens to be a "carnivorous" heroine in actual fact. As the only " herbivore" in the group, this girl usually hides behind other people's backs.

Nevertheless, that sort of position can easily turn around into an advantage as the "only one."

Anyway, when this volume goes on sale in August 2012, it happens to be during the anime's broadcast. Furthermore, it is also published after the anime plot focuses on her—Mariya-san.

It sort of feels like favorable tailwind (laugh).

As a side note, I definitely did not plan this ahead of time, it was simply coincidence (wry laugh).

I started writing this volume when the release date was still not set... Then by the time I noticed, I realized to my great surprise that

the release date miraculously coordinated with the anime broadcast schedule.

Could this be considered a coincidence of fate?

However, the one who will really receive favorable tailwind might very well be Liliana instead.

With regards to the Liliana story in the latter half of the anime, I am always surprised by the potential drawn out, going "this is too amazing" every time, even as the original author.

As Liliana fans, readers, please check out her anime version. Promise me.

Well then.

Of course, as the one responsible for the central role, Erica's all-important sense of presence, necessary for supporting the plot's development, has been portrayed thanks to the anime.

In actual fact, during Volume 1, rather than being the heroine, Erica would be more aptly described as the "hero" I recognized... This time, with images and audio added, I am once again confronted with the fact that she really is a heroine with her own strong and distinctive style.

Oh dear, despite the lack of Ena's appearances, she turned out to be quite a memorable character. So I guess all the heroines were successful in receiving favorable tailwind.

By the way, I also secretly assisted the anime as the original author .

Regarding all the various mythological knowledge mentioned throughout the story, I wrote up a new document suited to the anime's requirements.

Without paying attention to things like word counts, I once again cooked up new scenarios to add only to discover "what kind of puzzle is this..." What a brain-racking challenge (wry smile.)

Okay okay.

Let's talk a bit about the next volume. After such a long time, I intend to let another Devil King apart from our protagonist enter the stage.

Who will make an appearance, in what kind of manner, to cause what kind of commotion?

If possible, readers, please confirm for yourselves in Volume 14.

Actually, wait, I have already decided who is coming out to make a commotion.

Takedzuki Jou, July 2012

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Ozōni**(お): a Japanese soup containing mochi rice cakes. Strongly associated with Japanese New Year's, it is one of the most auspicious foods eaten for the occasion.[1]
   Oshiruko(お): a sweet porridge of azuki beans boiled and crushed, served in a bowl with mochi. It is loved by many Japanese, especially during the winter.[2]
2. ↑ **Kunikida Doppo**(國): (15 July 1871 – 23 June 1908) a Japanese author of novels and romantic poetry during the Meiji period.[3]
3. ↑ A reference to Johnny & Associates, a Japanese talent agency that trains and promotes groups of male idols.[4]
4. ↑ Reference to Maria-sama ga Miteru.[5]
5. ↑ **Former XX residence**(旧): most likely a veiled reference to the Kyu-Iwasaki-tei Garden(), a western-style residence that formerly belonged to the Iwasaki clan (founders of the Mitsubishi Group).[6]
6. ↑ **Cocktail party effect**: the phenomenon of tuning into a single voice while tuning out others, much the same way that a partygoer can focus on a single conversation in a noisy room.[7]
7. ↑ **Bodhidharma**: a 5/6th century monk who transmitted Buddhism to China and also started the tradition of physical training for the Shaolin monks.[8]
8. ↑ **Anglerfish hot pot**(鮟): the ankou-nabe is a hot pot dish made with the seven edible parts of the anglerfish: the fins, the skin, the gills, the liver, the stomach, the ovaries and the

meat itself, together with tofu and vegetables such as garland chrysanthemum, spring onions, shiitake mushrooms and Chinese cabbage.

9. ↑ **One-Seg**: a mobile terrestrial digital audio/visual broadcasting service in Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru.[9]
10. ↑ **Yuriwaka Daijin**(百): a young nobleman who is the protagonist in a legend set during the Mongol invasion of Japan in the thirteenth century.
11. ↑ Opening line of Homer's *Odyssey*.
12. ↑ **Kamameshi**(釜): literally "kettle rice," *kamameshi* is a traditional Japanese rice dish cooked in an iron pot called a *kama*.[10]
13. ↑ **Makunouchi**(幕): a popular type of Japanese bento which consists of fish, meat, pickles, eggs and vegetables along with rice and an *umeboshi*. There are also other kinds such as a chestnut-rice, sweetfish sushi and meat-and-rice-casserole forms.[11]
14. ↑ **Xue Pinggui**(薛): the protagonist of a Chinese folk story set during the Tang dynasty. He married the prime minister's daughter and later went on a military expedition out west, eventually becoming the king of Western Liang, finally returning to China to reunite with his wife.
15. ↑ **Steller's sea eagle**: *Haliaeetus pelagicus*, is a large bird of prey inhabiting coastal northeastern Asia and mainly preys on fish. On average, it is the heaviest eagle in the world. This bird is named after the German naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller.[12]
16. ↑ 2 Samuel 1:27
17. ↑ Psalm 22:22

18. ↑ **Malaysian burger**: a reference to the Ramly burger.[13]
19. ↑ **Pre-established harmony**: a reference to Leibniz's *Monadology* which theorizes that all substances (including minds and bodies) casually interact with one another because God programmed harmony in advance.[14]
20. ↑ Poem #1101 of the Man'youshuu.
21. ↑ **Onmyoudou**(陰): literally "the way of the Yin and the Yang", mixing science and occult, a traditional Japanese philosophy based on Chinese concepts of the Five Elements and the Yin-Yang duality. Users of onmyoudou are called onmyouji().[15]
22. ↑ Joshua 6:16,21
23. ↑ Numbers 31:7
24. ↑ **Hassou-no-kamae**(八): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.[16]
25. ↑ Godou specifically uses *omae*(お), a rude form of "you" in normal usage.
26. ↑ Joshua 6:16
27. ↑ Numbers 31:7